A Critique of Anti-Corruption Measures Implemented in the Post-1994 South African Public Sector

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Abstract: Corruption in South Africa is a cancer which has persistently eroded at, and undermined socio-economic development efforts, poverty alleviation and good governance in the country. A number of surveys conducted by different organisations on the corruption perceptions by the South African citizenry indicate that there is a growing perception that the government is failing to combat corruption and corruption is steadily increasing in the face of numerous strategies to curb it. Over the past ten years, the South African government has reacted to both domestic and international pressure to curb growing incidences of corruption within the public sector. This has led to the development of several pieces of legislation, special investigation units, committees, commissions of inquiry and task teams. Most of these are created on a case by case basis and yield no prosecutions or punishment for the guilty parties. A number of watchdog organisations and citizens have expressed fear that the blatant impunity enjoyed by high ranking civil servants undermines accountability and encourages corruption. Using literature review and the desk top approach, this paper contends that fighting public sector corruption in South Africa requires a single and encompassing institution which has autonomy, its own power and authority. Adopting the 'Rational Organizational Model' as a theoretical basis, the paper argues that a single organisation will prevent overlapping and duplication of work. The constant creation of task teams, commissions of inquiry and investigative units make it challenging to track success and effectiveness. The paper recommends that the work of a single organisation can lead to cases being investigated, monitored leading to prosecution and punishment. This affords the organisation a systematic way to determine lessons and best practices in addressing and eradicating corruption.

Keywords: Anti-corruption, corruption, Public sector, Rational organization theory

1. Introduction

This paper conducts a critical analysis by exploring key existing anti-corruption legislation and some institutions which are aimed at preventing and addressing issues of public sector corruption in the South Africa. The paper examines their powers, limitations and ultimately their efficiency and lack thereof in the fight against corruption. The researcher found that the current anti-corruption efforts are not effective as they rely on self-regulation by individuals who are in a position to act corruption. Although there are checks and balances in place, these have over time become ineffective in curbing corruption. Moreover, these individuals can at times use their political powers to interfere in their investigation and prosecution. The paper argues that the current anti-corruption measures are a toothless guard dog. The paper also argues that it is not the implementation of policies which is the main challenge in the public sector but perhaps the policies themselves are not implementation friendly. To present the findings, this paper is divided into three sections; the first section begins with an overview of anti-corruption literature, this is followed by an overview discussion of key legislation, predominately that which draws from the Constitution of South Africa which was adopted in post 1994, the third section deals non-judicial with anti-corruption institutions in South Africa and the final section discusses the rational organization theory as a model for a new anti-corruption organisation.

South Africa is nearing 25 years of democracy, despite this achievement corruption is on a persistent upward rise, both in the public and private sectors. Since 1994, "South Africa's political transition to a non-racial democracy has been blemished by frequent incidents and allegations of government corruption, involving elected officials and public servants" (Naidoo, 2013:522). Week after week, the public is bombarded with media reports of new and old reports of corruption. Corruption in the public sector usually stems from public officials abusing public office for private gain (Naidoo, 2013). Another definition of corruption is "involving behaviour on parts of officials in the public sector whether politicians or civil servants, in which they improperly and
unlawfully enrich themselves, or those associated with them, by the misuse of the power entrusted to them” (Fijnaut & Huberts, 2002:4). The recurrent problem of public sector corruption suggests the cases of improper and unethical conduct and behaviour by politicians and public servants is a constant feature and an intrinsic risk in the public sector (Naidoo, 2013). This risk hinders sustainable development, foreign direct investment, service delivery and poverty alleviation. These are some of the reasons why corruption is a threat to the prosperity of a nation.

According to the 2018 Corruption Perception Index, South Africa is ranked as the 73rd least corruption country out of 175 countries. This ranking is the country’s all time since 1996. It has previously averaged around 51.39. The Corruption Perception index ranks countries and regions around the world based on how corrupts the public sector is perceived to be (Trading economics, 2019). Corruption undermines the legitimacy of the state and democratic governance, it has a negative effect on public perception and trust of the government and most critically negatively impacts service delivery thus taking away from vulnerable members of society, furthermore it undermines the integrity and running of state institutions (Mathekga, 2017). An intricate part of the practice of public administration is to illuminate processes which are ineffective and explore the factors contributing to ineffectiveness in order to be able to formulate solutions, thus improve public sector functioning. It is thus critical to understand why anti-corruption efforts are ineffective. According to Naidoo (2013:587), the achievement of the country’s objectives is possible if there is an intentional approach to improve governance and prevent corruption. There is an increasing observation that public sector corruption reinforces the unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities; and the fact that corruption is a threat to the basic premises of good governance and integrity in public administration, which are democracy and accountability. Anti-corruption measures are rooted in the classical public administration theory and practices which include ethics, management, accountability and what Max Weber referred to as “the systematic ordering of affairs and the calculated use of resources” (Basu, 1998:2). Public sector officials are trained, and duty bound to cater to the needs of the public Basu (1998: 6). This duty is articulated and accepted when they take oaths and sign their contracts, thus they are aware of their duty to the public.

2. The Nature of Public Sector Corruption in South Africa

In the past ten years, there have been several commissions which have been created to investigate allegations of corruption and misconduct by government officials. Other investigative clusters have been created based on recommendations from the office of the public protector and parliament. These investigations and commissions of inquiry have uncovered corrupt dealings involving several government officials including the former president Jacob Zuma. Corruption allegations against Zuma began before he became president, during his presidency and after his term in office ended. Corruption at high levels, such as that of the president, contributes to the decline of society’s moral and perceptions of corruption. The nature of corruption in the public sector is predominately among individual government officials, business owners/businesses and the ruling party. Government officials, who are also from the ruling party facilitate favours for business owners, business owners in return perform favours for the ruling party or pay the individual public official. When investigations are launched to uncover these corrupt activities, the corrupt individual public officials interfere in those investigations. A number of intricate and widely publicised corruption cases in South Africa include: the arms deal, which according to Badmus and Ajisebiyawo (2018:43), was the biggest post-apartheid corruption scandal in South Africa, although this $5 billion arms deal contract was finalized in 1999 it only became public knowledge in 2000. Other notable cases have been that of Shabir Sheik (a Durban business man) and Jacob Zuma (former RSA president) dealings, the friendship between the late Jacky Selebi (the former police commissioner) and Glen Agliotti (a known drug dealer), Jacob Zuma and the Guptas, several government officials and the Guptas as well as public officials and the BOSASA group as being exposed in the current and ongoing Zondo commission of inquiry.

The first challenge in fighting and preventing corruption in the public sector has been a lack of consequences for those accused of being corrupt and conclusiveness in corruption cases. Corruption cases many run for years without a conclusive end. Many public officials in South Africa have simply “gotten away with it” without being prosecuted. As a result of many not being brought to task, the culture of corruption continues to grow and become acceptable. This is because anti-corruption
agencies are more watchdogs than guard dogs in nature. According to Kuris (2015), citing the analogy created by Anderson (2011), both breeds make use of their superhuman senses to detect threats. However, their response to danger differs. Watchdogs –like terriers or foxhounds will raise the alarm through loud barks, they will even go as far as to chase the intruders and track them, but they will not fight rather they will flee or hide. In contrast, guard dogs such as Rottweilers or pit bull tend to pursue and engage threats and are prepared to fight them to the death. Kuris (2015) contends that anti-corruption authorities can be divided into "watchdog" and "guard dog" agencies, based on the strength of their investigative powers.

The second challenge stems from political interference when it comes to anti-corruption institutions carrying out investigations. For example, former Scorpions employees complained that the disbandment of their critical crime investigating unit, which was then replaced by the Hawks, was done to protect powerful members of the ruling party, whom they were investigating at that time Naidoo (2013). The afore mentioned unit had been formed as a result of the decisions taken by the African National Congress (ANC) at its 52 National Conference of the ANC. Naidoo (2013) contends that they ANC called for such a unit to be created as a response to the growing problem of corruption. The power of politics is reflected in this example because a decision taken by a political party at the party conference led to the formation of a special unit.

The third challenge is the role of commissions of inquiry and the courts. Commissions of inquiry do not have binding powers over their findings and recommendations nor do they have powers to punish the guilty. Commissions of inquiry can only make recommendations to the person who requested in the commission, in most cases this person is the president. Moreover, these recommendations are based on what they were tasked to investigate. The commissions of inquiry are usually created using a Terms of Reference in terms of section 84(2)(f) of the Constitution. In terms of section 1 of the Commissions Act, 1947 (Act No 8 of 1947), the President declares the provisions of the applicable Act with reference to the Commission and creates regulations which are applicable to the Commission. The power of the commission includes: procedural discretion for the inquiry process as well as the level of privacy they want to the inquiry to have.

The South African public sector like most public sectors in developing and developed countries is susceptible to corruption; this is because public servants have access to and control of the use and management of public funds. The control aspect of their duties and functions includes drafting of their institutions budgets, selecting and contracting third parties for the delivery of certain goods and services, and signing off or approving the use of funds. The public sector is going through challenges which include the mismanagement and misuse of public funds. At the same time, the economy of the country is growing at slow pace due to poor investor confidence, this means that government is taking measures to reduce public spending and reducing the number of civil servants working in the public sector. However, with all the considered challenges in mind, corruption is persistently on the rise and service delivery is on the decline. These two challenges are cyclic and with the damaging consequences on investor confidence and inadequate service delivery. Poor management of public funds negatively impacts service delivery, poor or lack of service delivery leads to public unrest which leads to reduced investment in the country. Furthermore, lack or low investment means that economic growth declines, leading to an increment in unemployment and poverty.

According to Pope and Vogl (2000), the complexity of implementing anti-corruption measures and fighting corruption tend to be affected or made ineffective by the politicisation of anti-corruption departments, agencies and other public offices. Moreover, the politicisation of public offices is a reoccurring phenomenon in the South Africa sector which contributes to corruption. Mulghan (1998:3) cites the view of politicisation as presented by Weller (1989) begins with the postulation that "politicalisation is can be said to be the opposite of political neutrality. He argues that politicisation has two tendencies which can be said to contradict two aspects of neutrality: the first one is use of the public service for party purposes (in contrast to the principle of neutrality that public servants should not be used for party purposes) and the appointment, promotion and tenure of public servants through party political influence (in contrast to the principle of neutrality that appointments, promotion and tenure should be independent of party political influence)".

In South Africa problem politicising public offices and functions begins with the appointment of senior public officials. The process is a top to bottom
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1. 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Institutions under the legislation</th>
<th>Types of corruption cases it deals with or aimed at preventing</th>
<th>Sphere of government in which it operates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)</td>
<td>The office of the Public Protector</td>
<td>To investigate government, government departments, government agencies and government officials that is alleged or suspected to be improper or to result in any impropriety or prejudice; to report on that conduct; and to take appropriate remedial action</td>
<td>All sphere of the government including cases reported by citizens and opposition parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Auditor general of South Africa</td>
<td>Conducts performance audits and produces audit reports on all government departments, public entities, municipalities and public institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Public Service Act (1994)</td>
<td>The South African public sector</td>
<td>Regulates conditions of employment and discipline within the public service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Executive Members Ethics’ Act (1998) and Code</td>
<td>All National and provincial government departments</td>
<td>Ethical code of conduct: Conflict of interest cases, use of power for financial gain</td>
<td>National and provincial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Competition Act (1998)</td>
<td>The Competition Commission and the Competition Tribunal</td>
<td>the investigation of prohibited practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Prevention of Organised Crime Act (1998)</td>
<td>All government and non-governmental institutions</td>
<td>combating organised crime; money laundering; criminal gang activities and racketeering activities.</td>
<td>All sphere of government, all citizens and residents of South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Public Finance Management Act (1999) and Regulations</td>
<td>National Treasury</td>
<td>obligations on organs of state to investigate corruption within the sphere of public procurement</td>
<td>All spheres of the government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Protected Disclosures Act (2000)</td>
<td>All government and private sector institutions/organisations</td>
<td>Disclosure of information about criminal, irregular conduct in the workplace. Provides for protection against any employment-related reprisals as a result of such disclosures</td>
<td>Public and private sector employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Promotion of Administrative Justice Act (2000)</td>
<td>All organs of the state</td>
<td>Prevents foul play in decision making</td>
<td>All spheres of government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Municipal Finance Management Act (2003) and Regulations</td>
<td>Local government</td>
<td>Secure sound and sustainable management of the financial affairs of inter alia municipalities in the local sphere of government</td>
<td>Local government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Prevention and Combatting of Corrupt Activities Act (2004)</td>
<td>Public and private institutions</td>
<td>The general offence of corruption and specific offences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Public Audit Act, 2004 (Act No. 25 of 2004)</td>
<td>The Auditor-General of South Africa (AGSA)</td>
<td>Mandates the AGSA to perform constitutional and other functions</td>
<td>All spheres of government and all state institutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Information adapted from Corruption and the Law: a quick reference guide
2. 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.

The main role of the Public Protector and the Auditor-General are to safeguard democracy values such as transparency and accountability. According to Murray (2006:7), chapter 9 institutions are not without some criticism. Most criticisms levelled at them are that of their work not being independent, how they choose to prioritise their work or the way in which they go about it and at times driven by a political agenda and, the other criticism is of being partisan.

4.1 The Office of the Public Protector

The establishment of the office of the Public Protector is prescribed in Chapter 9 of the Constitution. The Office of the Public Protector and its role was brought to prominence by the former President Jacob Zuma administration (2009-2017). The Zuma administration and its inherently corrupt nature brought the work of the Public protector into the consciousness of the public as there was a lot of corruption to uncover.

4.2 The Auditor General South Africa

Table 1 indicates that the Auditor General, like the Public Protector, is an institution informed the Constitution. The role and powers of the Auditor-General are to audit, inspect and compile a report on the accounts, financial statements and management of all the provincial and national departments, local governments and any other public institution (Hlongwane, 2018). The Auditor's general's role and powers lends to how effective he is in performing his duties. However, the AG does not prevent corruption but merely uncovers it after it has occurred. At the same time, the recommendations he provides can arguably prevent future corruption or perhaps close the loopholes for future corruption. Hlongwane (2018:16-20), identifies six challenges faced by government anti-corruption institutions, which include; limited powers, lack of resources, lack of knowledge on corruption, uncoordinated activities, a lack of independence, insufficient protection mechanism for whistle-blowers. It is these challenges which contribute to the weakness and inefficacy of the institutions. However, one also has to acknowledge that fixing these issues in various institutions might not be possible or might be a costly expenditure. Limited powers mean that institutions must work with limitations which can affect access and control to their operations. Working with limited power can also influence the legality or legitimacy of their findings in the long run. Acting with power means acting without authority, this can lead to legal troubles, with financial implications on the institutions.

5. Theoretical Framework: The Rational Organisation Theory

According to Pillay (2004) to successfully eradicate corruption, the key requirements are impartial democratic institutions, open elections, and unfettered access to information. However, “institutional responses in South Africa appear to be hamstrung by intra and inter institutional manoeuvring, which deflects, as well as subverts the integrity of these efforts” (Naidoo, 2013:523). According to Lawson (2009) international organisations like the World Bank have called for structural and one normative reform. The reform agenda on the structural front has found that discretion plus monopoly minus accountability leads to corruption, whilst normative agenda has discovered that by raising awareness of the adverse effects of corruption has been identified as the first stage in the creation and dissemination of a global anti-corruption norm. It is on the basis of the former sentiments that bring to the forefront the idea of centralising anti-corruption in South Africa. One cannot say with absolute certainty that centralisation will curb corruption especially if the established organisation is a monopoly with absolute power. At the same time, the challenge of multiple organisations has led to duplication of work and limitations.

Critiquing South Africa's multi organisational/institution anti-corruption approach is informed by the rational organisation theory. De Sousa (2009) conducts an analysis of anti-corruption agencies around the world with special focus on specialised anti-corruption units. They units are usually formed by parliamentary commissions, inquiry committees, special police branches or anti-corruption leagues (De Sousa, 2009). Many anti-corruption agencies are created to perform either a preventive or restraining role. In the making a case for the existence of multiple anti-corruption institutions De Sousa (2009), explains that some agencies in South east Asia and Europe were established either by the
declining colonial powers as an attempt to clean up the reputation of their colonial administrations or were established by the newly independent governments as a part of their endeavours, within the framework of self-determination and sovereignty to build a new public administration free from the old habits and "corrupt" practices inherited from the colonial powers. This is where the logic of anti-corruption institutions being preventive and restrictive finds expression. This is reflected in the case of South Africa, which the new democratic government which came into effect in 1994, it needed to transform loopholes created in transitional governance negotiations and a whole public administration.

South Africa has also followed the route of establishing Special Investigating Units. This was done two years after transitioning to a democratic state. These units were created under the legislations of the Special Investigating Units (SIUs) and Special Tribunals Act (74) the acts created in order to create a directive for the President to establish structures which would investigate and adjudicate civil cases involving serious malpractice or maladministration (including corruption) in state institutions. The Act, which empowered the ad hoc creation of ‘SIUs’ later led to the creation of a permanent entity known as the 'Heath Special Investigating Unit'. It is worthwhile to remember that the new government under a democratic South Africa needed to transform a civil service which had been morally corrupt for decades.

The new democratic government inherited a distorted system of governance which included institutions that were in direct conflict with the requirements of sustainable economic growth, social development, and reintegration into the world economy (Pillay, 2004). Moreover, there was the urgent and mountainous challenge to address a deliberately designed racial society inequality especially in terms of access to opportunities for those who were previously marginalised. The newly elected democratic government sought to create measures and procedures which could prevent corruption as well as that which would rehabilitate some inherited corruption practices left by the apartheid regime.

Anti-corruption agencies are institutions normally created by necessity and at other times as a last resort towards accountability and transparency. They are often established because of public sector scandals and crisis and tend to be created by broad political consent to help explain why the scandal occurred, the underlying causes of the scandal and how long it has been ongoing. In most cases in South Africa, anti-corruption strategies especially those of inquiry are created as a response to evidence and whistle blowers witness accounts exposing corrupt activities. Other which have led to investigations and probing have been instances of failed service delivery, poor service delivery, the quality of services delivered, avoidable and preventable deaths because of poor or lack of service delivery and political battles. These occurrences are often found to be caused by corruption from the tendering process to the rewarding of the tenders. The problem of having multi institutions is that it can lead to the duplication of the same work, political interference disguised as institutions and the case of "too many cooks spoiling the broth". Naidoo (2013:528) citing arguments by Persson, Rothstein and Teorell (2010,5), argues that "actors including leaders, civil servants and citizens tend to use their' rational behaviour collectively towards anti-corruption control measures. When they act as a collective, their power is regulated and constrained, rather than being individually pre-determined, this also means that their collective incentives are shaped by 'interactive' and 'reciprocal' exchanges and shared expectations can impair the effectiveness of anti-corruption controls". Thus, that is the limitation of collective action. It is from here that the researcher proposes a single organisation should be created to fight corruption in South Africa modelled on the rational organisation theory.

The rational organisation theory is derived from two classical theories of the organisation. These include Frederick Taylor's (1913) "The Principles of Scientific Management" and Max Weber's (1922) "Theory of bureaucracy" in "Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft". According to Louis (2015) Weber's theory, which will be used in this research is primarily focused on bureaucracy and structure of the organisation. Although these theories emerged from different sectors of the economy, for example Taylor's theory came from factory production and Weber's theory was from public administration offices. However, what they have in common is that both models adhere to the standardization of work, control of quality, division of labour and a strict hierarchy (Groth, 2012:2-3). According to Leegard and Bindslev both school focus on task, performance and structure.
According to Leegard and Bindslev (2006), the schools of rational theory hold a common belief regarding expected staff behaviour in rational organizations, they are as follows:

- Transparency to enable consequences of organizational choices to be assessed.
- Adjustability for the attainment of maximum productivity.
- Need for flexibility in replacing parts of the organisation and avoid key staff.
- Need to reduce infighting to maintain achieved positions.
- Top-down management and control.
- Professional and rational behaviour without disruptive emotional relationships.

According to Groth (2012), Weber's work was interested in the role the organisation plays in politics and economics in general. Weber believed that bureaucracy of an organisation would supersede all other organization forms. According to Weber, the efficiency of bureaucracy had the potential to lock man into an "Iron Cage" of machine-like existence. The need for a rational anti-corruption organisation is more critical where the variance of multiple organisations have failed the nation. A rational anti-corruption organisational will be more formalization and with a single goal orientation. Olmez, Sumer and Soysalc (2004) contend that open system institutions which different from the rational organisation were more focused on individual and organizational level interactions to allow and foster a considerable role for power, bargaining, negotiation, and compromise with the organization. It is these kinds of organisations which have failed to curb and prevent corruption. Thus, South Africa has moved beyond prevention to attempts of uncovering the extent of corrupt activities. The uncovering which usually involves investigations and commissions of inquiry is a new and growing expense on the already resource strung public administration. Olmez et al. (2004) contend that Weberian formal rationality largely means that individuals are not left to their own discretion in searching for the best way of attaining a given objective in the organisation. Olmez et al. (2004) argue that an organisation operating within the rational framework will eliminate the following concerns:

- Continuity and systematization in standardization of work attitudes;
- A systematic approach to training so that employees are not left with their own solutions performing their jobs;
- Research and inspection for finding better ways of performing tasks and for identifying deterioration from planned methods;
- Calculation of both goals and outcomes for objectivity and ease of analysis; and
- Planning of operations and commitments for avoiding problems during the operation.

Despite it strengthens, the rational organisation is not without some criticisms. For example, critics of the theory contend that bureaucracy has four main irrational limitations in terms of its ideal type, its negligence of the informal aspect of the organisation, and its dehumanized view of individuals working in the organisation as well as its relationship with democracy" in particular, Weber's bureaucracy does not consider the important role of the informal relationships that exist in any human organisations" (Al-Habil, 2010). Al-Habil (2010) argues that this model is idealistic and utopian in its outlook. If the argument then is that the model is ideal, then it is what anti-corruption strategies and institutions should be striving towards. In response to the critique of the dehumanization of individuals in the institution, that critique, should examine the precision which military personnel operate, as well as the army efficiency. Bureaucracy remains the means for achieving rationally ordered social action in fighting and preventing corruption. After all, non-rational approach to anti-corruption has failed dismally.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

It is evident that having multiple institutions to fight against corruption leads to the scarcity of resources and duplication of tasks challenges in anti-corruption efforts. The establishment single bureaucratic and rational organization to fight corruption means that there can be no duplication of efforts. Moreover, resources can be channelled into a single organisation, power is also centred and manageable within a single organisation which has a clear hierarchy instead of multiple organisations with limited
powers. This will provide government with ways to track all cases and all anti-corruption activities systematically. The rational organisation would be adequately equipped with knowledge of corruption as research and planning would be streamlined and standardised. Weber’s bureaucracy model informed us that, the normative operation of an institution lends itself to adhering to standardising of work, control of quality, division of labour and a strict observance to hierarchy, allowing for workers to be singularly focused and thus effective in their tasks.

References


