

Crime & Corruption

Workshop 9

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Problems, issues and challenges

Three inputs were given. The first input debated the meaning of corruption in our current context, noting that corruption is something that has not only appeared in post-Apartheid South Africa but also has historical roots. It is important to note that corruption not only occurs at a public level and in civil society but also exists on a private level. There is therefore a need to delve into and plot the parameters of crime and corruption, and not assume it is simply something that happens in government.

The second input focussed on crime amongst juveniles (under 18) and young adults (under 21). Recent crime statistics for juveniles and young adults indicate a worsening situation, and we must note too that the statistics, based only on what is reported, grossly underrate the actual occurrence of crime. We need the government to improve facilities for juveniles, but at the same time, religious workers have a role to play in assisting traumatized juveniles, including those who come from broken homes. Poverty and high rates of unemployment, of course, are a major causes of crime and important domains of 'rehabilitation'. The assumption is that a decrease in poverty levels will decrease the occurrence of crime and corruption.

The third input addressed prisons. Prisons are overcrowded and the correctional services do not concern themselves with rehabilitating prisoners, only with punishment. Budgetary shortages were normally given as reason for deficiency of facilities for rehabilitation. Criminals are usually rejected by the community, which leads to further crime. In the case of juveniles they are often kept with hardened criminals leading to the reinforcement of criminal organisations.

Out of these presentations, three major themes developed: /end p. 136/

Theme 1: causes and classifications of crime

There is a need for a nuanced approach to understanding 'causes' of crime

- The causes of various crimes—e.g. syndicate crimes, sexual crimes, ideological crimes and white collar crimes—should be differentiated.
- Distinctions should be made between different areas of crime—i.e. black and white, as shaped by Apartheid constructions of geography.
- Crime may be seen as a reaction to circumstances which need deeper analysis.
- Peer group pressure may also be seen as a cause and a stimulant for crime.

There is a need to break perpetual cycles

- Perpetual imprisonment caused by unemployment is an example.
- Economics as a cause of crime: a person is arrested, then later returns to the same economically deprived environment which leads to the perpetuation of crime.
- Even though government has instituted mechanisms whereby prisoners acquire skills, these prisoners when released return to an environment which lacks resources.
- Proper rehabilitation needs to be instituted.

Roles for religion and government

- Policy makers and leaders in society should be role models: People at all levels take risks when they see others that have not been apprehended or sentenced for crimes committed.
- Religion should change people's perceptions and focus on qualities such as generosity and togetherness in an attempt to overcome corruption.
- Need to challenge the 'ethics of greed'.
- The government has sometimes sent out wrong signals to the people and corruption still prevails amongst government officials; this perpetuates the occurrence of crime.
- There should be an equal distribution of resources and skills.
- Religion and the community should play a role in terms of assisting former convicted felons.
- Unemployment: Religious institutions should take the lead in initiating structures to equip people with skills rather than blame the government.

Need for rigorous analysis

- Why do some people *not* commit crime? Why is it that under the same circumstances other people *do* engage in crime? We should look not only at the causes of crime but also consider healthy situations of non-criminals.
- The Indian community exemplifies the prevalence of a low crime rate rooted in the maintenance of their tradition, largely because they were not mentally colonised. *[Is this a sustainable claim? —Editor]*

Theme 2: breakdown of morality, quest for a new morality

How does morality link to crime? Even though poverty plays a role, moral standards are also fundamental. Distinctions in crime are based on moral standards—i.e. assessment of each crime varies depending on the moral standards that govern one's judgements.

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Breakdown of morality

- The embracing of western morality in many parts of South Africa has led to the breakdown of traditional morality.
- Apartheid and political corruption have also played a role in weakening morality.
- Since many elderly people did not participate in the political struggle, at least after the crackdowns of the early sixties, traditional morality has been lost as younger opportunists took the lead and set the standards. These youngsters compromised and eroded traditional morality in the name of the struggle.
- Some of those who are opportunists are now in leadership positions and have acquired material well-being and status in government.
- There is thus a high level of crime and corruption within government as well as in civil society and the business sector (white-collar crime).

Envisioning a new morality

- Morals and values need to be revisited in an attempt to establish a new morality.
- Morality should grow from the grass roots level.
- Morality should be prevalent within the two spheres of 'religion' and 'politics', and religion should serve as an educating influence.
- The relationship between morality and religion should be explored.
- Traditional religious, and secular ideals, like 'Ubuntu' and 'African Renaissance', should be thought through as possible value-based foundations to tackle crime and corruption.
- The relationship between 'morality' and 'power' needs exploration.
- A common morality should be forged between the government and the community, as well as the poor and the rich—some basic minimum set of norms and standards to which all will commit themselves.

A role for religion?

- Is the Church worthy of being the educator of morality? What have churches traditionally been engaged in? In many cases, their focus has been primarily on the hereafter (inward looking) rather than socio-economic and moral issues prevalent within the community.

The Church should not be co-opted by the state in setting moral standards.

- The Church tends to be reactive rather than proactive, but it should take the initiative.

Theme 3: problematising ‘the past’

It is not possible to discuss the issues of crime and corruption without considering the legacy of Apartheid. But we should not fixate on the past and thus avoid the present need to strive for normality. We should refrain from placing each other into simplistic categories of blackness or whiteness. There should be an extended period of reconciliation and healing. In this regard the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has not served its complete function. /end p. 138/

Solutions and ways forward

Role of religions

- Religious organisations need to break down the divisions they have created and look at their own contribution to eroding a common set of values by their exclusivist positions.
- The hierarchical system in religious organisations needs to be challenged. People should be empowered to bring forth morals and values that govern them in their local contexts, and to take responsibility in that area of formation.
- Prophetic statements and values should be weighed against corrupt practices in order to bring about behavioural changes.
- Religion should guide people as to how to relate to each other.
- Crime and corruption can be curtailed by teaching and imbibing each other with qualities of love and compassion, and by following basic qualities of respect— i.e. for fellow human beings and their property.
- Religious groups should spearhead networking to create a type of ‘peer pressure’.
- Religion can play a role in terms of counselling victims of corruption.

Looking to home for wisdom

There is a problem of African academics going on theoretical drives and making use of foreign theories. South Africans and Africans should look to their own resources and insights in terms of dealing with and resolving their problems. In a pre-Apartheid system people developed systems amongst themselves to deal with crime, violence, abuse and corruption. In the post-Apartheid setup a similar trend should be followed.

Mobilising communities

- We should operate as small cells initiating programmes on a small scale moving into different spheres of life.
- Public awareness should also be raised by means of education and training, research and monitoring, and participatory research in all sectors of society.
- An ‘Anti-corruption Summit’ will take place in the near future where all the different sectors of society will come together to address the problem of corruption systematically taking into consideration ideals such as transparency, integrity, accountability and responsibility. This needs to be followed up at all levels.
- Corruption is multifaceted and takes on different forms. Everyone needs to take responsibility wherever they find themselves. There is room for everyone to make a contribution towards combatting corruption.

Accountability

A system of checks and balances should be instituted whereby responsibility and accountability is visible and can be measured. Thus a preventative system should be implemented with proactive monitoring.

Democracy and corruption

- How do we grapple with the issues of crime and corruption without violating the ideals of democracy in our attempts to crack down on criminals?
- Decision making on all levels should be made transparent—i.e. openness in making decisions. /end p. 139/
- Society does not operate in a vacuum. All members of society should participate in decision making processes with the necessary responsibility and accountability in combatting crime and corruption.

Plurality

- Ethics/morality is not only the domain of religion. Other sectors also have a say. In terms of ethics and morality, how we determine what is corrupt may be different for different groups.
- There is no pure position in terms of what corruption is.
- Discussion and debate around determining what corruption is will shape policy making.

Final observation

An important observation during the workshops was the usage of the term 'Church' as being regarded as synonymous with Religion. There was a definite bias towards the religious tradition of Christianity. The Multi-Event 99 suffered in numbers and perspectives from a 'Christian bias' and needs to hear the challenge of plurality as the process continues. /end p. 140/