

# **Fighting against Corruption to Ensure Good Governance through Social Accountability in Sustainable Communities: The Need for an Effective Institutional Mechanism for Sri Lanka**

**U.A.T. Udayanganie**

*Department of Public and International Law, Faculty of Law*

## **Background**

Many socio-political problems such as the increased cost of living and the waste of public money for various inadequate programmes that we have today directly or indirectly contribute to the existence and growth of corruption. In addition, it leads to increasing criminality, extreme poverty, stifling economic development and ultimately frustrates democracy and good governance. It also hinders social, economic and political potentials in Sri Lanka. In the present context, corruption has become an endemic issue and has many negative impacts for poor people in Sri Lanka. The augmenting nature of corruption is evident according to the increasing rates of the Government Corruption Perception Index of the country. In 2008, Sri Lanka ranked 72 and in 2011 it rose up to 86.<sup>1</sup> The Corruption Perception rate in 2011 is 3.3.

In such a situation, good governance is unattainable. Sri Lanka recently failed to meet the GSP qualifying criteria largely due to its dismal performance in the area of good governance. Good Governance should be participatory, transparent and accountable. It must also be effective, equitable and must promote the rule of law. Good governance ensures that political, social, and economic priorities are based on broad consensus in society and the voices of the poorest and the most vulnerable are heard in the process of decision making over the allocation of resources.<sup>2</sup>

Sri Lanka has ratified the United Nations Convention Against Corruption in 2004. But the convention does not include a definition of corruption. But in other parts of the convention, there are definitions of some of the main types of corruptions such as bribery and extortion, by both of public officials and private sector, embezzlement, misappropriation of funds and other diversion of property etc.

Sustainable communities are settlements which meet diverse needs of all existing and future residents, contribute to a high quality of life, and offers appropriate ladders of opportunity for household advancement, either locally or through external connections.

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<sup>1</sup> The Corruption Perceptions Index ranks countries/territories based on how corrupt their public sector is perceived to be. A country/territory's score indicates the perceived level of public sector corruption on a scale of 0 – 10, where 0 means that a country is perceived as highly corrupt and 10 means that a country is perceived as very clean. A country's rank indicates its position relative to the other countries/territories included in the index

<sup>2</sup> Good Governance and Sustainable Human Development, Governance for sustainable Development-A UNDP Policy Document, Available at <http://mirror.undp.org/magnet/policy/chapter1.htm>

They also limit adverse external effects on the environment, society and economy,<sup>3</sup> thereby ensuring that governance is a key element in sustainable communities.

In this scenario, the objective of this paper is to outline and evaluate corruption and its impacts on good governance in the country. Further, this research has emphasized the necessity of an effective institutional mechanism that focuses on the interdependence of the executive, parliament, judiciary, public institutions, private interests and civil society participation.

### **Methodology**

A comprehensive literature survey on this regard had been carried out by the author. The necessary information was gathered from secondary sources accessible and available in the library such as journal articles, textbooks, research and working papers, government publications, newspapers, electronic data bases and e-journals. Analyzing of data For the purpose of giving recommendations had been done by the author.

### **Outcomes**

According to the survey, most public sector bodies dealing with the public such as Health, Education, Police, Inland Revenue and the Customs are extremely corrupted. The Parliamentary Committee on Public Enterprises (COPE) has revealed that the country had lost a large amount of wealth due to financial malpractices of many state institutions and departments. With regard to the allocation of money, for welfare programmes and other programmes, an imbalance can be seen by respective and responsible authorities in addressing burning issues of the country. In addition, utilized resources have failed to reach service providers or users due to expenditure tracking problems. There is no proper mechanism to monitor the weak initiatives for effective service delivery process. Therefore, service recipients too have encouraged corruption.

Though Sri Lanka has several Non-Governmental Organizations for fighting against corruptions, Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruptions is the only government supported institution. It is difficult to see any government supported institution in provincial council or local government level.

But initiating a public interest litigation process against the privatization of Lanka Marine Services and the Sri Lanka Insurance Corporation are evident in the process of fighting against corruption.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Strengthening the right to information law is very important for fighting against corruptions. The right to receive information should be a fundamental right. Then, people have a right to know why certain decisions are taken and why some decisions are not followed. Rulers should keep in mind the fact that they are the only trustees and government is created by the people for the benefit of themselves.

The development outcomes should be equally beneficial for the poor community as well. An intuitional mechanism is required to monitor leakages of public money. For the

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<sup>3</sup> .Kearns,A.,& Turok,I., Sustainable Communities: Dimensions and challenges, Available at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/146853.pdf>

purpose of fighting corruption, this paper suggests ensuring social responsibility through Participatory Public Expenditure Management (PPEM). For achieving this target budget formulation, budget review, expenditure tracking and performance monitoring are essential.

National level institutions especially those providing basic services such as education, health, the Police, Inland Revenue and Customs can establish their own subsidiaries for fighting against corruptions. It will increase the participation of people in the process of complaint. In addition, by amending already existing legislations involving local government (Municipal Council Ordinance, Urban Council Ordinance and Pradeshiya Sabha Act) can create special branches to deal with complaints on corruption in local government level. Further, strengthening the role of the Ombudsman and giving him specific powers on dealing with complaints against corruptions of public officials will be a progressive step.

Sri Lanka is considered as an aid dependent country. In this context, external financing plays a vital role for formulating the development strategy of the country. Therefore, the mechanism that guarantees an effective use of international aid and investment is essential. Refining existing policies and regulating new policies in order to encourage peoples' participation will be needed in this issue. The right to be free from corruptions should be considered as a right of the fourth generation.