



## INCLUSIVE SOCIETY INSTITUTE

### Op-ed

#### ***Challenges and opportunities to enhance social mobilisation to combat corruption*** ***By Professor Evangelos Mantzaris and Daryl Swanepoel***

Perhaps the greatest challenge to bringing about effective social mobilisation and reining in the rampant corruption that is strangling South Africa, is a deep mistrust among citizens in those in power. The latest Afrobarometer opinion poll has shown that trust in the country's Parliament stands at 27%, while the trust in the president comes in at a lowly 38%. Trust in the courts of law has dropped to 43%. As for political parties, the level of trust in the African National Congress has fallen to 27% and is especially low among more educated and younger South Africans, while the opposition parties' tally is at a lower 24%. The Public Protector received a 42% vote of trust, while only 36% trusted the Electoral Commission of South Africa, with trust levels particularly low among younger respondents. With a 56% approval rating, the Department of Health recorded the highest level of trust in comparison to other state institutions.

Citizens expect good and ethical governance at all levels of society. In fact, it is their constitutional right as members of a democratic society. This means that politicians and public administrators are obligated and expected to adhere to the principles of accountability, transparency and integrity, which are the cornerstones of anti-corruption measures such as detection, prevention and deterrence. Additionally, once the trust of the people is lost, it is not won back by verbose party manifestos, distribution of food parcels or pre-election promises, but by politicians' and administrators' actions.

Unsurprisingly, the lack of political trust in South Africa is the result of brazen political misdeeds by political actors. The misdeeds include corruption, lack of ethics, state capture and perpetual legal violations. The only logical conclusion one can come to is that politicians purposefully and consciously turn a blind eye to their responsibilities as elected officials. Their actions threaten the very legitimacy of the system of governance, which leads to the aforementioned mistrust among the voter base and can even cause non-compliance of the law by citizens.

Recently, government's plans and activities have been negatively associated with a plethora of dirty dealings, including two of its Cabinet Ministers spending R3.5 million in hotel accommodation, and the Covid-19 supply chain and procurement-based multibillion-rand theft. The impact of such actions on the relationship between the government and its citizens hugely undermines the honesty, accountability and legitimacy upon which administrative mechanisms operate within a democracy that is healthy and corruption-free.

Every time a new policy is announced, political trust is brought into question. All levels and positions in the state apparatus come under scrutiny: from the president to the provincial premier, municipal mayors, judiciary, political parties, 'corrupt mediators', even the politicians' families. In most cases, personal distrust overlaps with governmental distrust, because policy, planning and implementation is in most instances personified by a specific individual. Familiar faces in political and senior administration dominate all social media, while middle managers in the small municipalities live it up and drive their Maseratis.

But all is not lost. While the citizens of South Africa still have a voice there is hope. To pave the way to social accountability initiatives, South Africans' participation in the fight against corruption must be mobilised and this can only be achieved through their active involvement and coordination that leads to collective action capabilities. A deep study and understanding of citizens' expectations and attitudes is required as this lies at the root of preparing a strategic path to build activities that empower citizens to counter corruption.

And the mobilisation must start on the level of local government. Continuous engagement of all trusted and widely respected stakeholders and actors in their communities will enable them to share and articulate the communities' voices. The creation and development of participatory budgeting that leads directly to the planning, formulation, decision-making and monitoring of budget execution, especially at local government level, is required.

For an example of a successful anti-corruption body, we need look no further than to one of our neighbours to the north. In Rwanda, an Anti-Corruption Advisory Council is headed by the country's Chief Ombudsman and includes nine members from the key state departments, civil society organisations and private sector. A coordinating Secretariat is responsible for a daily campaign covering the whole country and reports the corruption and anti-corruption failures and successes daily on radio, television and social media.

Furthermore, all the Council members communicate daily with the media, private sector and civil society, convincing them to become actively involved against corruption and mobilise their communities and constituencies to become an integral part of the effort. The Council operates at national level but is also decentralised at district, sector and cell levels. The country's civil society leadership has been encouraged to cooperate with the Council to sensitise the public to the consequences of corruption, research and reports of corruption to the police, National Public Prosecution Authority, and the Office of the Ombudsman.

An example of a similar initiative in South Africa is the Whistle-Blower Protection Unit, which is responsible for considering the circumstances under which suspicions of wrongdoing can be reported inside and outside of organisations. Politicians and administrators who risk reporting these corrupt activities therefore put themselves and their families, co-workers and managers in potentially serious danger.

While legislation exists that provides protection from occupational detriment for employees who disclose information of unlawful or corrupt conduct by their employers or fellow employees, more needs to be done. There are a number of changes that could be introduced such as proper training, which will have a positive effect on the workplace structure, or the introduction of much stronger policies with severe consequences for the corrupt.

Citizens' trust in state institutions and their rulings, or opposition parties, is a serious barometer of a healthy democracy. This trust epitomises the very essence of democratic legitimacy that is both internalised and externalised by peoples' zest for wholehearted willingness to participate and act in the building of a democratic State that rewards honesty and punishes corruption. To regain and enhance the trust of its citizens, government must take very visible steps to fight the corruption among its ranks.

***Professor Evangelos Mantzaris is the lead researcher for the Inclusive Society Institute's study into the establishment of a National Anti-Corruption Advisory Council. Daryl Swanepoel is the Chief Executive Officer of the Institute.***