Is Corruption A Threat To Sustainable Human Security? Towards Empowered Citizenship

Alfredo Sfeir Younis
President, Zambuling Institute for Human Transformation

If the answer to the question posed by the title of this note is "yes", it means that we have at least created more **collective awareness** around what is now a worldwide disease: **Corruption!** However, in my view, the debate does not end there. This is why the first issue of the IJSHS is so relevant. It 'raises the bar' in the way we now need to address national socioeconomic development and the form we may provide useful and practical policy recommendations to decision makers.

Today, we know that **human security** is neither the affair of the State nor just an issue of protecting the **national borders** of a given nation. Our society is fully aware of the fact that **empowered citizenship** is beyond the traditional concept of the **nation state**. Human security is an issue anchored in people and, therefore, it is the value of **empowered citizenship and the strength of democracy** that will make sustainable human security a reality.

On the one hand, citizenship includes all those issues related to the sovereignty of national borders and other forms of sovereignty (ecological, social, human) and, on the other hand, it embraces issues related to human welfare, justice, equity, solidarity, peace, and cooperation. Human security is fundamentally a concept that refers to **a society as a collective entity**. This is why the theme of **sustainable human security** is so intimately linked to growth, development, ecology, sustainability, empowerment and social capital expansion. These are the elements that make sustainable human security relevant to people. It is not just drawing physical borders.

Corruption disharmonizes a society via the rechanneling of existing resources (including money and other forms of capital). In addition, it erodes the existing institutional framework for development opportunities, it reassigns power and concentrates decisions in the hands of the "haves" and not the "have nots", it eliminates important social actors (or marginalizes them)

including their customs and traditions, it allocates resources away from development and poverty alleviation into less priority opportunities including speculation and money laundering, it increases the transaction costs of many important exchanges in development (production, consumption, trade, technology development), it erodes and destroys our justice systems at all levels, etc.

Corruption acts as a cancer to sustainable human security because it weakens the foundation of **collective citizenship** and the core of any **democracy**; both fundamental for development, welfare improvements, human transformation, and empowerment.

In turn, the weakening of **collective citizenship and democracy** has profound effects on trust, expectations, hopes, social behavior, participation, private sector engagement, entrepreneurship, technological advances, and capacities of any political and institutional system to respond. And, as development experience demonstrates that transformation of our societies results from opportunities, security, and empowerment, then, corruption needs to be urgently eliminated.

It would be easy to say that there is **a blueprint** to solve this problem. At least, I do not have it. Nonetheless, we find in each of the articles presented in the IJSHS many of the possible courses of action that countries and the international community may adopt and implement. This note will not list those propositions. Instead, I would like to share some relevant thoughts which emerged from a major political presidential campaign which took place in Chile.

The first thought is that the ultimate point of correction and, in a sense, the point of departure to moving away from corruption lies in the **empowerment** of those who are not actively involved in corrupted practices. Fortunately, this is the majority of people in the country. Thus, my proposition is not just to adopt measures to disempowering the "corruptors" but also empowering very decisively and strongly the "corrupties" and all citizens. If the rest of society does not have the awareness and the level of consciousness regarding the negative impacts of corruption, then, this phenomenon will continue to deepen in our societies.

The second thought is that this correction process must be accompanied by an institutional-cum-organizational framework that is strong, coherent and responsive to a strong foundation for people and community based **anti-corruption programs**. This is necessary to enhance **people's participation** at all levels of development including **anti-corruption programs**. For the moment the legal as well as the practical mechanisms for people's participation are almost absent. Just to say that people should participate to strengthen **collective citizenship** is not enough. This participation must be financed just as any other development project. Participation has a cost and, as a public good, this participation must be financed by the state. For the moment, this proposal to finance participation remains outside the interests of governments.

The final thought is that **there are many forms of corruption** in all countries of the world. One of the most profitable forms of corruption is when governments give access to the private sector to exploit a given natural resource (mining, fisheries, and water) without asking

for a fee that reflects the true opportunity cost of that resource. Royalties are far from the true intrinsic value of the resources in question. In addition, there are **formal and informal forms of corruption**. It is central that we create the conditions to eliminate all forms of corruption. Information is the key to reveal to society in general about what is happening with our resources invested in development and what, who and why corruption is in the middle of this process.

There is nothing in development that replaces the value and powers of **human consciousness**. At the basis of any development process and behind any act of corruption there is a person or a group of people. It is the **level of consciousness** of those people that will end up transforming our development process and eliminating existing inequality, poverty and suffering.

In most cases corruption needs to be battled by a conglomerate of countries. One country working on its own will not be able to attain the major objectives of **anticorruption programs and projects**. Here, the interplay between national authorities and the international community is extremely important. **Justice system reform programs** must be a priority.

 Empowered citizenship is the engine that will make human security sustainable.