



Publisher
Sustainability for Regions



OVERVIEW OF CORRUPTION IN SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

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Received 14 July 2024; accepted 30 October 2024; published 30 December 2024

Abstract. The study aims to investigate the current state of corruption (focus) in the South African context (locus). Bribery, financial mismanagement, abuse of power and authority, fraud, favouritism, nepotism, and disregard for organisational ethics are just a few examples of how corruption manifests itself today. Whatever the form, corruption has a negative effect because it fosters a culture of misconduct, incompetent governance, poor leadership, inadequate oversight measures and weak management practices. This study delves into the reality of corruption in the nation and identifies the reasons behind its resistance. A combination of literature and document reviews and document and conceptual analysis were used to gather and evaluate qualitative data. Several information sources were used, such as newspaper articles, journal articles, news channel reports, official anti-corruption documents, Acts, South African legislative frameworks, internet sources, etc. What are the causes of the rise in corruption in South Africa? is the research question posed for the study. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 is related to establishing good governance in the nation, hampered by corruption. The study uses the good governance theory as a theoretical framework that could help the government establish a culture of integrity, accountability, openness, and the rule of law. To achieve SDG 16, the study recommends creating an ethical environment in all ministries, departments, and government entities, including local, provincial, and national.

Keywords: Corruption; good governance; qualitative study; misconduct; sustainable development goals (SDGs); South Africa

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Vyas-Doorgapersad, S. 2024. Overview of corruption in South African context. *Insights into Regional Development*, 6(4), 82-95. <http://doi.org/10.70132/m5427877235>

JEL Classifications: D73, H83

Additional disciplines: Development Studies, Public management

1. Introduction

A major problem in South Africa's public service is corruption, defined as the improper use of public resources, offices, and powers for private or personal gain (Mlambo, Mphurpi & Makgoba, 2023). Corruption is also increasing in local government, not just at the national and provincial levels. In the context of South African municipalities, the Code of Conduct for Municipal Staff Members (Schedule 1 Municipal Systems Act) quoted in de Visser, Steytler, Chigwata and Beukes (2020:11) defines corruption and prohibits municipal staff members from: exploiting their status, benefits, or access to private information for personal gain; deciding on a matter where the employee, their spouse, partner, or business associate has an interest on behalf of the municipality; having a stake in or receiving benefits from a contract with any municipality; working outside without the council's approval; improperly (trying to) sway any municipality employee or structure in order to achieve a personal gain; transacting business with a council member without the council's approval; utilising or profiting from any asset or property owned by the city that the employee is not entitled to; and asking for, receiving, or accepting a gift, reward, or favour in exchange for disclosing confidential details of the entity.

Apartheid is a long-held phenomenon in the South African context. It is argued that South Africa's downfall in terms of corruption began through that phase (Hyslop 2005:773). Apartheid was defined as an organised system characterised by structural corruption that was marked by the abuse of authority to guarantee that the country's resources were primarily used for the benefit of the white minority (Bruce 2014:54). A small group of people held a virtual monopoly on wealth, power, and influence. They took advantage of this to either forcefully suppress the majority or, at most, reallocate resources to delay the coming revolution. Corruption was pervasive and deeply ingrained in South Africa's political and economic structures throughout the apartheid era (Qobo & Doods, 2013:129). The apartheid regime fostered a climate of structural inequality that encouraged corruption and provided a fertile ground for public servants and businesspeople to abuse their positions of authority (Qobo & Doods, 2013:129). This article aims to provide an overview of corruption in the South African context as a historical phenomenon, and it is increasing despite having legislative and institutional frameworks implemented in the country.

This study uses a qualitative research approach. Because qualitative research generates its content, it can provide fresh approaches to presenting historical data. It enables the collection of authentic ideas from socio-economic demographics (Gaille 2018:1). One of the main characteristics of qualitative research is that there are a variety of approaches and a spectrum of methodologies from which to choose, contingent upon the goals and research traditions of the study (Flick, Kardorff & Steinke 2004:11). The information was gathered using literature review of published information and document review of official information that is available in the public domain. Reviews of the literature are intended to give readers an overview of the sources used in investigating a specific subject and show them how the research fits into a broader field of study (cited in Ncamphalala 2019:16-17). As cited in Makhubu (2020:10-11), an examination of documents containing details about the phenomenon being studied is called a document review. The study's data analysis was executed through conceptual and documentary analysis methods. According to Furner (2004:233), concepts are handled as classes of things, occasions, attributes, or connections in conceptual analysis. To precisely define a concept, one must ascertain and delineate the conditions under which a particular entity or phenomenon is (or could be) categorised under the subject matter under consideration. Using conceptual analysis as an inquiry method aims to improve understanding of how particular concepts are (or could be) used for communicating ideas about a field of interest (Furner, 2004:233). According to DalGLISH, Khalid and McMahon (2020:1424), and adapted by Mutandwa (2022: 41), the methodical process of assessing or going over documents that can be used to raise queries, offer context, monitor changes over time, support other kinds of research data, and validate other sources is known as document analysis.

Corruption generally opposes accountability and the rule of law because it undermines good governance, which is crucial for the advancement of any nation (Jain, 2001:71; Dhlamini, 2024:17). Therefore, the study uses the Good Governance Theory (GGT) as its main theoretical framework to examine how corruption affects the outcomes of governance. Transparency, accountability, participation, and the rule of law are highlighted by GGT as crucial elements of good governance (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 1997:90). According to GGT, it is essential to have openness in decision-making procedures and public access to information to hold public servants responsible for their actions (Kaufmann, Kraay & Mastruzzi, 2010:51). To establish transparency in the governance process, good governance enables organisations to have monitoring and evaluation procedures to identify instances of misconduct, empowers strategic role-players to take responsible actions and decisions to identify and rectify corrupt practices, and disseminates this information to the public.

2. Corruption in the South African Context

The information in this section is compiled from various literature sources available in public domains. According to Busch (1999:248), patronage networks were one of the main methods of corruption under apartheid. The ruling party and government employed these networks to reward its followers and keep control of the country. Van Vuuren (2006:3), states that little thought has been given to the notion that powerful apartheid-era officials and

businesspeople may have unlawfully amassed enormous fortunes under the cover of authoritarian authority, in violation of even the then-current legal 'norms', since the establishment of democratic governance. As stated by Busch (1999:248), regardless of their qualifications or skills, this approach was utilised to give government contracts, jobs, and other resources to people who supported the regime of the day. According to Kirsten & van Vuuren (2012:315), people who got these perks frequently had ties to high-ranking officials or members of the ruling party and frequently used their privileges to enrich themselves. The security services were a substantial source of corruption during apartheid (Kirsten & van Vuuren, 2012:315). The security apparatus of the time was lavishly funded by the state, and as a result, these organisations which included homeland states (and their bureaucracies), the Department of Defence, the State Security Council, the Office of Military Intelligence, the South African Police (SAP), and front organisations for the national security and intelligence sector gained a bad reputation for brutality, repression, and corruption (Van Vuuren, 2006:14).

The truth was purposefully concealed from the public gaze in closed societies. The elite in the public have an exceptional opportunity to enrich themselves when they have an exclusive grip on power (Friedman, 2004:268). According to Newham (2002:3), one significant source of information on the level of corruption among senior police officers is the prosecution of Colonel Eugene de Kock, leader of the death squad. De Kock provided a plethora of evidence during his 18-month trial, demonstrating how widespread fraudulent activity was in his unit and how simple it was to commit corrupt acts. South Africa is still affected by the corruption that existed during the apartheid era. Friedman (2004:268) stressed that widespread corruption, which has impeded economic growth and damaged public confidence in the government, is still a problem in the nation. Even after apartheid was abolished and South Africa entered the democratic era in 1994, corruption still poses a severe problem to the country. Government officials and business executives have recently been implicated in several high-profile corruption cases, and the nation has consistently performed poorly in international corruption indexes (Friedman, 2004:268).

Corruption was expanding in the post-apartheid era as well. This statement is substantiated by the literature review that shows that the collusion between public and private figures is another aspect of venality and corruption in South Africa. The nation has a constitutional mandate and requirement for a competitive public procurement system (Makube, 2019:42-43). However, companies frequently conspire with government representatives to get contracts or receive special treatment. This frequently involved giving gifts or paying bribes to authorities in return for contracts or other benefits. South Africa is faced with not only various types of corruption but also significant levels of organised crime, which was frequently associated with corruption (Minnaar, 1999:1). Organised criminal groups engaged in a variety of illicit operations, such as the smuggling of products and human trafficking, prostitution, identity documents, and the trafficking of illegal drugs. Serving the market for illegal goods and services is typically profitable. To avoid prosecution or obtain preferential treatment, these syndicates frequently worked with government officials or law enforcement organisations (Minnaar, 1999:1).

The cases of corruption increased from 2010 to 2023. This statement is substantiated by the fact that the allocation of contracts for the 2010 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup was the subject of one of the biggest corruption scandals of 2010 (Molloy & Chetty, 2015:101). According to Molloy and Chetty (2015:101), mega-events and other large-scale infrastructure projects can offer the perfect setting for conspiracy and corruption, especially in nations with potentially weak institutions and disjointed decision-making processes. It had appeared on social media that one of the corruption charges that occurred after the event was centred on a business named Match Hospitality, which was charged with soliciting bribes from representatives of the South African Football Association in exchange for exclusive rights to market hospitality packages for the competition. After several years of inquiry into these claims, numerous FIFA officials were detained in 2015 for corruption (refer to BBC News, 2015). Rob Rose (2010, cited by Herzenberg, 2010:13) meticulously recorded all the possible conflicts of interest about FIFA's awarding lucrative World Cup contracts. Rose (2010) in Herzenberg

(2010) concentrates on two businesses: Match Hospitality, which is the official supplier of premium packages to companies, and Match Event Services, which is FIFA's only official lodging provider during the World Cup.

On a different note, there is a revelation of a significant corruption scandal involving the Limpopo Department of Education's misuse of funds. Millions of Rand tenders were awarded, yet students still needed textbooks to study (refer to News24, 2012). According to Rangongo, Mohlakwana & Bekman (2016:1), corruption persists in South Africa despite civil society's concerted attempts to remove it. One of the provinces with the most corruption-affecting educational institutions is Limpopo. According to the official reports, principals are the top perpetrators of financial mismanagement in Limpopo. This mismanagement includes, but is not restricted to, financial fraud, a lack of fiscal responsibility, a disrespect for the legal system, and a refusal to notify parents and student government organisations of financial information (Rangongo et al., 2016:1). Five provincial departments in Limpopo—the Provincial Treasury, Health, Transport and Roads, Education, and Public Works—were consolidated under national executive management by the national government in December 2011 because of underspending, supply chain management, as well as spending too much (Parliamentary Monitoring Group [PMG] 2014:1). This demonstrates unequivocally that the Treasury is failing to carry out one of its responsibilities, which is to keep an eye on the province's supply chain and financial management procedures. The failure of the Treasury to carry out its procedures [may have] allowed the breeding of corruption to happen (Murwamuila, 2014:782).

The heightened focus on political and government corruption between 2010 and 2015 was one of the most significant shifts. In 2010, corruption in the business sector received a lot of attention. However, by 2015, there was a growing perception that corruption had spread throughout the entire government (refer to BBC News, 2018). This was demonstrated by the high-profile corruption allegations made against several high-ranking officials, including former president Jacob Zuma, who was charged with accepting bribes from corrupt persons and arms dealers (refer to BBC News, 2018). Based on the information compiled from the available documents, there could be an illicit financial flow in South Africa in 2010 and the preceding years. Hence, the problem is one of the biggest concerns at the time and still requires corrective measures.

Another notable distinction was the heightened awareness and worry about corruption among the public between 2010 and 2015. Although it was widely accepted that corruption was a problem in 2010, many people did not view it as a critical priority (Corruption Watch, 2015). But by 2015, there was a growing sense of outrage and discontent among South Africans, and they were more outspoken in their demands for greater accountability and openness. The most often reported corrupt practices included housing waiting list violations, which have long been utilised by elected municipal council members, provincial politicians, and/or administrators by means of power, fraud, bribery, and corrupt income (Interview: Senior official of the Gauteng Provincial Treasury, 2015 cited in Mantzaris, 2017:21-22). This reality suggests that the housing waiting list lacks transparency, meaning that homes given to incumbent council members in exchange for a fee are periodically sold for large sums of money (Interview with ANC Regional Secretary, Eastern Cape, April 2015 cited in Mantzaris, 2017:21-22).

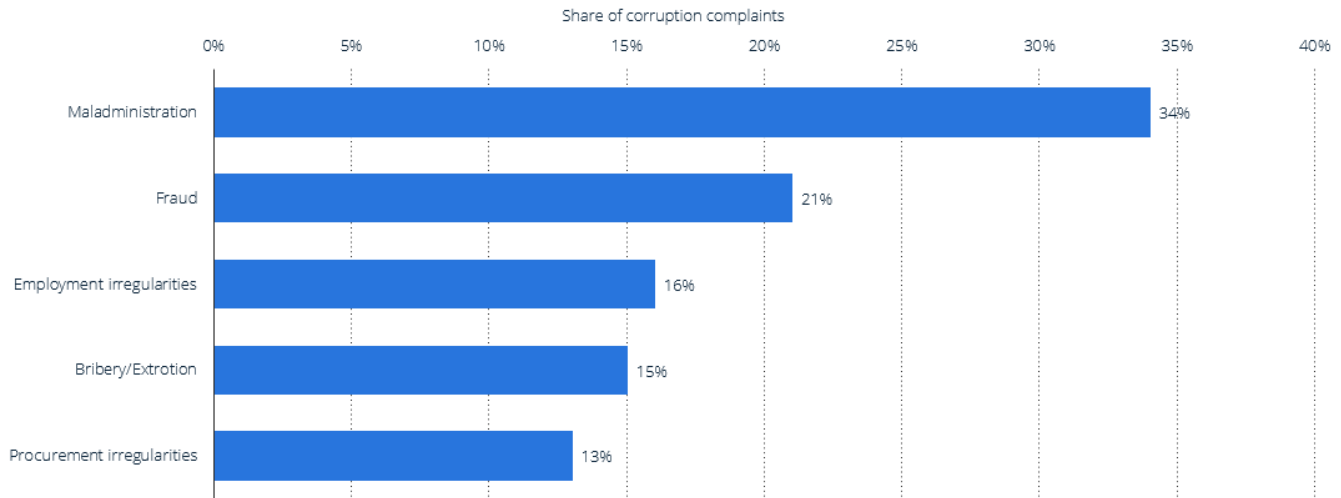
The growth of civil society organisations, anti-corruption movements, and the increasing media attention and public discussion surrounding corruption were all indicators that corruption was rampant in South Africa and something had to be done (Corruption Watch, 2015). Given the inverse relationship between South Africa's sustainable growth and corruption, genuine efforts must be taken to combat the vice, especially in the community administration segment of the republic's society. This is possible through encouraging dependable and morally upright leadership, which is supported by powerful institutions and mechanisms to find and get rid of corruption (Dumisa & Amao, 2015:107).

To coordinate efforts to tackle corruption, the South African government formed the Anti-Corruption Inter-Ministerial Committee (ACIMC) in 2014. The ACIMC started several high-profile investigations and

prosecutions of dishonest officials and executives, and their efforts led to several high-profile arrests and convictions (South African Government 2019). According to the Ethics Institute of South Africa (2019), corruption in the country has risen drastically, and many important institutions are currently dealing with severe problems with governance and corruption. The research identified several areas where corruption was particularly pervasive, including procurement, political appointments, and public sector compensation. According to the reports of the South African Government (2019), there were still a lot of obstacles to overcome in the fight against corruption, though, such as the drag-out nature of court proceedings and the lack of transparency in particular industries.

The COVID-19 epidemic also significantly affected corruption in South Africa in 2020. An increase in fraud and embezzlement using relief funds and other aid forms, as well as cases of corruption related to emergency procurement, was noted even before the pandemic began (Corruption Watch, 2018). According to Klaaren, Belvedere, Brunette & Gray (2022:5), before COVID-19 hit and a strict lockdown remained implemented to stop the virus' spread on March 26, 2020, South Africa had a formal unemployment rate of 30%, over a third of families were dependent on debt for income. The government's salaries and spending accounted for more than 34% of all consolidated expenditure in the 2019–2020 budget (Klaaren et al., 2022:5). The research singled out several industries, including local government, law enforcement, and the healthcare industry, where corruption was particularly pervasive throughout the pandemic (Klaaren et al., 2022:5). The COVID-19 epidemic of 2020 has not just brought South Africa's socio-economic inequities to light. However, it has also demonstrated how the nation's political establishment has continually been unable to stop corruption, so it has crept into every facet of daily life. Ineffective investigation and prosecution of corruption cases by law enforcement organisations contribute to a perception of impunity among those involved in corrupt practices (Mlambo & Masuku, 2020:549).

The situation has not improved, and as highlighted by Business Tech (2020:2; Vyas-Doorgapersad, 2022:15), South Africa has a high level of public sector corruption, as indicated by its CPI score of 44/100 out of 180 countries and territories worldwide, according to the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), a reputable leading global indicator of public sector corruption. This score also shows that corruption statistics are only increasing, and this trend can be illustrated in Graph 1 better to understand the prevalence of corruption in South Africa.



Graph 1. Prevalence of national corruption in South Africa as of 2023, by type
Source: Corruption Watch (2023); and Statista (2024a)

The trend shown in the graph is further elaborated in Table 1, which shows corruption is spreading in every South African province.

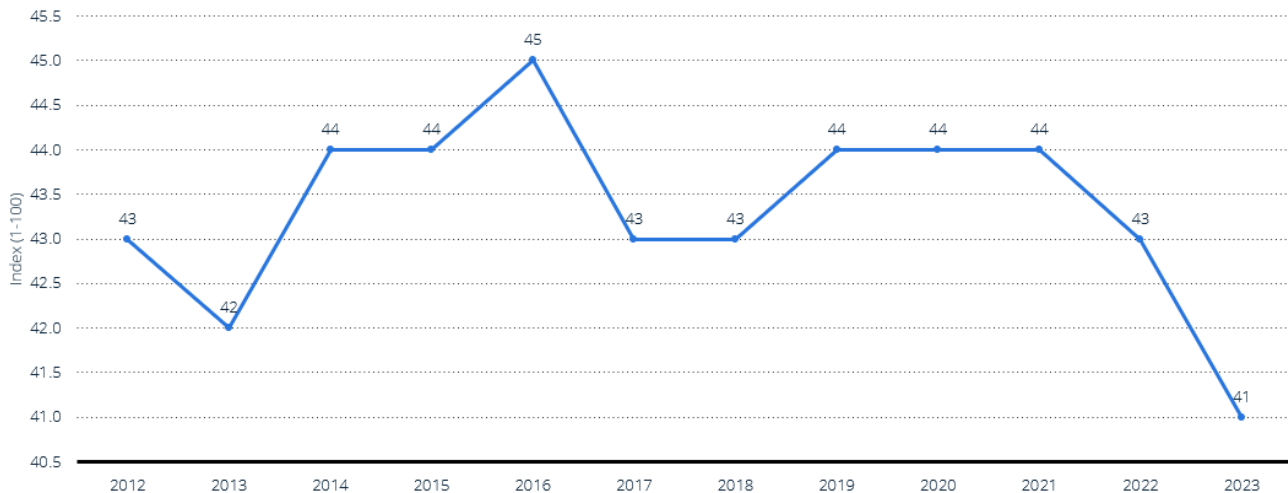
Table 1. Top types of corruption nationally in South Africa

Province	Type of corruption and percentage	Province	Type of corruption and percentage
Gauteng	Fraud (19%) Bribery/extortion (16%) Maladministration (13%) Abuse of power (10%) Procurement irregularities (9%)	Mpumalanga	Maladministration (39%) Employment irregularities (15%) Fraud (11%) Procurement irregularities (8%) Bribery/extortion (7%)
KwaZulu Natal	Maladministration (41%) Fraud (10%) Bribery/extortion (7%) Procurement irregularities (7%) Dereliction of duties (6%)	Limpopo	Procurement irregularities (18%) Misappropriation of resources (16%) Maladministration (16%) Abuse of power (12%) Fraud (11%)
Free State	Maladministration (33%) Employment irregularities (26%) Dereliction of duties (9%) Procurement irregularities (7%) Abuse of power (5%)	Eastern Cape	Fraud (17%) Procurement irregularities (14%) Maladministration (12%) Misappropriation of resources (11%) Dereliction of duty (9%)
Western Cape	Fraud (24%) Maladministration (15%) Dereliction of duty (12%) Abuse of power (9%) Employment irregularities (9%)	Northern Cape	Maladministration (22%) Bribery/extortion (20%) Misappropriation of resources (17%) Abuse of power (10%) Employment irregularities (10%)
North West	Maladministration (21%) Fraud (18%) Procurement irregularities (13%) Misappropriation of resources (10%) Bribery/extortion (10%)	Top Types of corruption nationally #1 Maladministration (34%) #2 Fraud (21%) #3 Employment irregularities (16%) #4 Bribery/extortion (15%) #5 Procurement irregularities (13%)	

Source: Compiled from Corruption Watch (2023:25)

The statistics stated in Graph 1 and Table 1 are categorised and summarised, highlighting seven types of corruption recorded in nine provinces. Based on the report published by Corruption Watch (2023:25), the highest type of corruption recorded was maladministration, with a prevalence of 34% nationwide, followed by fraud, recorded as 21%. The third type of corruption was related to employment irregularities that had 16% statistical prevalence. Bribery/extortion was the fourth type (16%), and then procurement irregularities were recorded as 13%. The other two types of corruption were reported as dereliction of duty and abuse of power. The highest prevalence of fraud was recorded in Western Cape (24%). The province of Western Cape also had the highest reports of dereliction of duty (12%). The bribery/extortion rate was reported as 20% in Northern Cape. Maladministration was reported highest in KwaZulu Natal at 41%. Abuse of power existed highest in Limpopo (12%). Limpopo also had high procurement irregularities (18%). Employment irregularities were recorded as the highest in the Free State (26%).

The trend has a negative impact on the corruption perception index (CPI). As revealed in Transparency International's (TI) January release of the 2023 CPI, the country has slumped to its lowest score ever (Corruption Watch 2023:22). The Executive Director of Corruption Watch, Mr Karam Singh, shared his sentiments stating that "It is frustrating that, in a country like South Africa, where the corrupt have been exposed for all to see in such public processes as the Zondo Commission and robust media investigations, so few of the implicated parties have been brought to justice" (Corruption Watch 2023:23). The corruption trend and disappointment are shown in Graph 2.



Graph 2. Corruption Perceptions Index Scores in South Africa 2012-2023

Source: Corruption Watch (2023); and Statista (2024b)

Despite these difficulties, some encouraging advancements were made during this period in the battle against corruption. For example, Cyril Ramaphosa, the new president of South Africa, established a panel of investigation into state capture in 2018 to investigate allegations of official Abuse and corruption by those working in the public and commercial sectors (Ramaphosa, 2018:1). There were numerous high-profile arrests and prosecutions associated with these incidents. The commission made notable conclusions and recommendations (Ramaphosa, 2018). The opinions were stated in an interview by the President on the 23rd of April, 2018, posted on the national government's website.

3. Challenges to combat corruption in South Africa

There are various reasons that corruption is thriving in the country. Some of the reasons are stated in this section. One element that creates a possibility for corrupt behaviour is political authority. The absence of moral principles is another factor in why individuals commit corrupt behaviours. The absence of ethical values and beliefs is among the subjects related to moral defilement. In addition to the lack of integrity, other factors include selfishness, greed, and temptation (Othman, Shafie & Hamid, 2014:254). Those in positions of power develop an elevated and conceited perspective of their value, which prevents compassion for others. These people in positions of authority usually think of themselves as above morality (refer to Othman et. al., 2014).

Another reason is linked to the lack of transparency in the governance. Kolstad and Wiig (2009:522) suggested that corruption is less risky and more alluring when there is a lack of transparency; using incentives to get public officials to perform honourably is more difficult when there is a lack of transparency; choosing the most trustworthy and effective individuals for roles in the public sector or as contract partners is challenging when there is a lack of openness; rents are accessible thanks to informational advantages, which makes reform challenging; a lack of transparency increases the likelihood of opportunistic rent-seeking and makes it harder to maintain collaboration; and a lack of transparency can threaten social norms and diminish confidence (Kolstad & Wiig, 2009:522).

Sandholtz and Taagepera (2007:110) explain that demanding and providing unlawful private payments were structurally encouraged by the command economies of the communist era. In these societies, according to Hooker (2009:251), corruption was such a ubiquitous and permanent reality of life that it was ingrained in societal norms and behaviours as a part of the culture. There are instances when the ideals of various cultures differ (Hooker 2009:251). The assertion that civilisations typically agree on the basics but vary on details is false. The discrepancies are fundamental because they are based on various views of human nature (Schmitt & Allik, 2005:623). All cultures, however, fall short of their aspirations. It is not that some civilisations are 'less ethical' than others; instead, each society has a unique breakdown pattern. The corruption phenomena well illustrate these truths. The best way to understand corruption is as corrupting behaviour that weakens the cultural system in which it takes place. Certain behaviours can be corrosive as different cultures operate differently (Schmitt & Allik, 2005:629).

Poverty is a significant reason that people may engage in misconduct practices to earn extra money to support their dependents financially. Corrupt practices make it more challenging to eradicate poverty. It might undermine the efforts currently underway to combat impoverishment in developing countries. Corruption and poverty have many frequent connections (Negin, Rashid & Nikopour, 2010:1). Public sector corruption hinders economic growth, redirects it, and exacerbates suffering. Poverty within itself also encourages corruption since it damages social, political, and economic institutions (Negin et al., 2010:1). Corruption can affect inequality of income and impoverishment through several processes, such as overall economic growth, unjust tax laws, and inefficient welfare initiatives (Gupta, Davoodi & Alonso-Terme, 2002:24).

Due to its history of colonialism and apartheid, South Africa has a culture of power abuse and exploitation. The political and economic structures of the nation have been permanently impacted by the legacy of these systems (Naidoo, 2013:525). Even though South Africa and other African states have policies and measures in place to stop, or rather decrease corruption, intra and inter-manoeuvring by those in the office tend to subvert anti-corruption efforts, and this results in the problem of bribery not being solved (Klaaren et al., 2022:15). Political leaders, political scientists, and development economists have all made significant efforts to establish the perfect combination of elements that best explains South Africa's condition. It is impossible to overstate corruption's

detrimental impact on the well-being of the people in sub-Saharan Africa, among the other elements considered (Forson, Baah-Ennumh, Buracom, Chen & Peng, 2016:567).

According to Makhado (2016:1), the South African constitution requires the parliament and National Assembly to establish protocols for overseeing the executive branch to keep it accountable for the expenditure of taxpayer monies under sections 55(2) and 114(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) (Makhado 2016:1). To oversee the public sector, including state-owned companies, the National Assembly and Legislatures established committees such as Public Accounts Committees (PACs) (Makhado, 2016:1). These Committees play a crucial role in making sure that public funds are utilised sensibly, and efficiently to serve people. The fight against corruption and the misuse of power is still an uphill battle in South Africa (Makhado, 2016:1). South Africa has established and launched numerous important institutional mechanisms for judicial oversight (Kgobe & Mamokhere, 2021:7-8). Matebese-Notshulwana (2019:10) further asserts that the public service of South Africa is still plagued by pervasive problems with failure to comply, transparency, and answerability. Conduct that is unaccountable or not answerable, as well as the misuse of office authority, has significant repercussions for the nation's future and the implementation of good governance practices. Therefore, according to Matebese-Notshulwana (2019:15), the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (SCOPA)'s duty and purpose as a crucial parliamentary tool should be to promote public accountability.

4. Conclusions

Based on the findings drawn from the literature review and official documents, the study proposes some policy recommendations for improvement. In the foreword of the National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2020-2023, the President of South Africa stated that corruption, in whatever form, is a sign of a breakdown in the principles that guide our country. It is a severe challenge to our democratic ideals and our aspiration to become a morally upright and progressive state if it is allowed to continue unchecked (RSA, 2019:7). Even the business community has accepted the idea that cooperating with regulators and policymakers to improve the environment where commerce occurs may be in everyone's best interests (South African Government, 2019:7). However, ethics need to be instituted at an individual level whereby employees can be able to demarcate between right and wrong. This level of awareness can be created by establishing an ethical culture in an organisation. This statement is substantiated by the opinions of Vyas-Doorgapersad (2007:299) and further stressed by Maile & Vyas-Doorgapersad (2022:79), emphasising that to regulate misconduct and implement appropriate measures to curb it, the public sector must create a proper ethical environment that allows public officials' ethical behaviour to be observed.

President of the World Bank Wolfensohn noted in his 'cancer of corruption' address that ordinary people worldwide demanded action against corruption because they had personally experienced its negative effects. Raising the stakes for public participation in anti-corruption initiatives requires enlisting first-hand experience (Wegulo, 2022:19). Corruption at the municipal government level looks to be rising because decentralisation has become a government strategy in recent years (Basheka & Mubangizi, 2012:638). However, in the context of South Africa, critique of decentralisation emphasises that it has "expanded opportunities for corruption, patronage and 'jobs for pals'" (Feinstein, 2021:1). On the other hand, studies on the issue of corruption frequently mention topics like social accountability, public engagement, and citizen participation, but local government is less frequently the centre of attention than the major levels of government (Basheka & Mubangizi 2012:638). Decentralisation was firmly established in South Africa's Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and later put into practice by several laws, including the Local Government Municipal Structures Act (No. 117 of 1998) and the Local Government Municipal Systems Act (No. 32 of 2000) (Basheka & Mubangizi, 2012:638). In addition to these legislative frameworks, it is also important to have human resources and labour relations measures available to deal with any misconduct in organisations. This is highlighted by Vyas-Doorgapersad and Ababio (2010:425), and Vyas-Doorgapersad and Mothabi (2022:366), who emphasised that, to analyse the

implications, ethical behaviour in public settings and all its surrounding conditions could be the focus of scientific investigations.

Stakeholders that can make a huge difference in combating corruption are auditors and accountants. If executed properly, the duties of accountants and auditors will be a good indicator of public sector governance (Okpala 2017:209). They are essential to deliver accurate and moral financial data to help administrators control, manage, and track the national budget to accomplish macroeconomic goals (Okpala, 2017:209). Okpala (2017:210) concluded that the level of corruption and governance in society significantly correlates with the education and training of accountants that support good bookkeeping. So, nations that lack educational fields find it very difficult to pinpoint areas of corruption and its perpetrators.

For South Africa to reach its goal of a land that has no corruption, all stakeholders must be included in realising the goal. Even though the nation has stakeholders that play their part in trying to alleviate corruption and financial misconduct, these stakeholders do not work in an integrated way, which is why positive results are difficult to achieve (Organisation Undoing Tax Abuse [OUTA] 2024).

According to the study, efforts to fight corruption should begin at the top. First and foremost, a moral and honest political atmosphere is necessary. Instilling moral values and principles into the political ideologies of all political parties in the nation can help achieve this. It is within the purview of each political party to guarantee that all members must complete an ethical training programme to comprehend the fundamentals of good governance. This could help all participants present a moral picture of the nation and its people to the rest of the world.

All government departments and ministries should mandate that their employees attend ethics workshops. These training sessions must be held regularly to educate both new recruits and senior staff members about the repercussions of misbehaviour and misconduct. The labour relations division and human resources department must ensure that all workers know 'what' constitutes misconduct and 'what' will happen if they are discovered engaging in maladministration. To educate employees about ethical working practices, the ethics workshops should cover organisational culture, values, ethical management, ethical practices, good governance, ethical norms, etc.

Employees must also accept personal accountability for their work and behave morally. Employees may need to adapt and adjust to the organisational culture and learn to set aside personal values, biases, and personal beliefs to participate in ethics workshops. Employees should follow the organisation's code of conduct, develop morally sound behaviour, and uphold the organisation's core values of integrity, respect, and morality.

Establishing an ethics strategy is necessary for organisations to instil a culture of organisational ethics management. They also need to implement appropriate monitoring and evaluation procedures to oversee unacceptable and unethical workplace behaviours, have appropriate measures for handling whistleblower complaints, and have an open-door policy that allows staff members to feel comfortable discussing unethical behaviour with management. These steps could help government agencies, ministries, and departments at all levels to stop or lessen corruption in their domains.

There are limitations to this study. Interviews with pertinent officials in government ministries, departments, and local government authorities were not feasible due to the topic's comprehensiveness, complexity and sensitivity. Future research will also consider the desktop analysis examining interventions for reducing corruption at the county level and their effects on achieving SDG 16. The fields of development studies and public management will benefit from the findings of comparative and longitudinal research exploring ethics management and good governance.

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