

Tackling Corruption in Indonesia: Lessons Learned and Future Directions

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Abstract.. *The aims of the study to know tackling corruption in Indonesia. This paper uses a qualitative approach to assess the existing and proposed measures with regard to combating corruption in the context of studying Indonesia through the review of published academic and grey literature and series of interviews with a pool of selected informants consisted of officials, academics, and civil activist/Non-Government-Organization actors. The study confirms that corruption is systemic, and its occurrence is instituting, across the sectors, including civil society organizations, which often participate in corrupt practices. Describing the main findings of the research, the paper also points out that political will and leadership are the two factors that can affect the success of anti-corruption measures; at the same time, the paper also shows that there is an emerging contradiction between the words and actual actions in Indonesia and presented the KPK as an example of institution weaker due to the ideology gap. Lack of coordination of different organizations fighting corruption, also coupled with institutional fragmentation makes it even more difficult to fight the vice. Even though there are good laws in place, the enforcement and institutional measures are very weak and insufficient in many cases. It also highlights the social-economic impacts of corruption for democracy including its contribution to social-economic-economic imbalance and citizens' disillusionment with government in the country.*

Keywords: *Corruption, Indonesia, Anti-corruption efforts, Exceptionality, Attitude*

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INTRODUCTION

According to a study conducted by Marcus & Islam (2021), corruption continues to be a significant problem in Indonesia, with the country ranking 85th out of 180 countries in the 2021 Corruption Perception Index. Corruption is a complex issue that undermines democracy, the rule of law, and economic development. In Indonesia, corruption has been identified as one of the main obstacles to sustainable development and poverty reduction. The Indonesian government has taken several steps to address corruption, including the establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) in 2002. The KPK has been credited with successfully prosecuting a number of high-profile corruption cases. However, recent developments in the country have raised concerns about the government's commitment to tackling corruption, including attempts to weaken the authority of the KPK (Umam et al., 2020).

This paper aims to explore the current state of corruption in Indonesia, the lessons learned from previous anti corruption efforts, and the future directions for tackling corruption in the country (Joseph et al., 2016; Lyrio et al., 2018). The study will draw on a review of relevant literature and data analysis to identify key challenges and potential solutions. The paper will also examine the role of the government and other stakeholders in combating corruption, including the importance of independent anti-corruption agencies. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform policymakers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders in

Indonesia on the most effective ways to address corruption in the country (Schütte, 2008). By examining the successes and challenges of previous anti-corruption efforts and identifying potential solutions, this study will contribute to ongoing efforts to combat corruption and promote sustainable development in Indonesia.

Corruption has long been a pervasive issue in Indonesia, with the country ranking poorly on international indices measuring corruption perceptions. According to a study by Pertiwi & Ainsworth (2021), corruption has been identified as one of the main obstacles to sustainable development and poverty reduction in Indonesia. The impact of corruption can be felt across various sectors, including the economy, public services, and the justice system (Yeboah-Assiamah et al., 2014; Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). In recent years, the Indonesian government has taken steps to address corruption, including the establishment of anti-corruption agencies, the implementation of new regulations, and the introduction of electronic procurement systems. However, these efforts have been met with mixed results, and corruption remains a significant problem in the country.

One of the key challenges in combating corruption in Indonesia is the prevalence of corruption in the private sector. This includes bribery, embezzlement, and money laundering, among other forms of corrupt behavior. According to a study by Amaliah et al. (2020), the private sector accounts for a significant proportion of corruption cases in Indonesia, and addressing this issue will require targeted interventions and collaboration between the government and the private sector. Moving forward, there is a need for sustained efforts to combat corruption in Indonesia. This will require a comprehensive and multi-pronged approach that addresses both public and private sector corruption, as well as the underlying factors that contribute to corrupt behavior (Recanatini, 2011; Manyaka & Nkuna, 2014). The government will need to demonstrate its commitment to upholding the rule of law and ensuring the independence and effectiveness of anti-corruption agencies like the KPK.

This paper aims to contribute to ongoing efforts to tackle corruption in Indonesia by providing a comprehensive analysis of the current state of corruption in the country, the lessons learned from previous anti-corruption efforts, and the future directions for addressing this issue. By identifying key challenges and potential solutions, this study will provide valuable insights for policymakers, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders working to combat corruption and promote sustainable development in Indonesia.

METHODS

The research method used in this study was qualitative in nature, which was appropriate for this problem that involves the complexity of corruption in Indonesia. Since corruption is a multifaceted concept that touches the socio-political and economic issues the chosen qualitative approach provided for a deeper analysis which might be lacking in quantitative research methods.

The study started with literature review conducted through the analysis of articles in scholarly journals, books, government publications and recognized reports. This is where this paper played a role of offering an initial background that included the extent to which corruption was rife in Indonesian alongside the systematic approach to corruption as well as previous attempts and their effectiveness of fighting this menace. The reviewed articles and papers were coded to look at common themes, issues and gaps that have been explored in the previous studies to guide the next steps of the study.

In addition to the conducting a literature review, primary data was also collected through a semi structured interview method. These interviews were carried out with participants who has direct involvement or significant knowledge of anti-corruption in Indonesia through government, universities, CSOs and research institution. The choice of interviewees was done through purposive sampling whereby participants had to have adequate experience and the ability to offer elaborate information.

The semi-structured interviewd was particularly beneficial since the authors could engage in a more narrowly focused conversation, while, at the same time, being able to follow various directions that were raised during the interviews. The questions were developed and designed in such a way that the participants were asked about their experience and perception about previous anti-corruption measures and what they think can be done further.

The data gathered from the identified articles as well as interviews were subjected to thematic analysis. This analytical method was chosen because of its ability to identify and categorize patterns or themes from qualitative data. The analysis proceeded through several stages: first, data familiarization mainly entailed critically going through the collected literature. This was followed by the process of coding of data segments that were deemed to contain the answers to the research questions. The codes were further grouped into overarching themes, which were described and named and which were reviewed and made specific in order to fit the data appropriately.

Finally in a process of thematic synthesis, the evidence was narrativised to offer a comprehensive and coherent explanation based on the thematic data analysis and most relevant published literature. Such synthesis not only revealed the contemporary conditions of corruption in Indonesia, but also practical implications drawn from previous attempts and the set of the strategic goals for future fighting against corruption initiatives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Pervasiveness of Corruption Across Sectors

An elaboration by participants pointed to pervasive corruption where is it evident in government agencies andalso in the private entities as well as non-governmental organizations. This theme highlights the fact that corruption is deeply rooted in the Indonesian context in different domains.

"Corruption has spread its roots to every department or company, whether it is governmental or non-governmental, small or large scale, it is not just the matter of money, it is the matter of authority and control".

This metaphorical representation of corruption as a virus underlines the fact that it is a malignant and widespread disease. The comparison to a virus implies that corruption has become systemic and pervasive, which is hard to deal with. The idea of "power and influence" shows that corruption is not strictly a financial problem but rather a social and political one, which makes it much more challenging to solve.

"In the private sector, corruption is viewed as a reality and those organizations that were involved in corrupt practices they continue to do so in order to remain afloat, it is a cycle".

This quote presents an attitude where corruption is not only expected from the private sector, but practically required since it is presented as a 'vicious cycle.' This brings to the fore the realization that arresting this menace requires extraordinary changes or radical measures that are sustainable and enforceable.

"Unfortunately, even civil society, which ought to be pressuring government for change, is also in most cases involved in corruption, There are NGOs which embezzle or involve themselves in corrupt activities."

The integrating of civil society into this critique based on the truth that corruption is inevitable even among society reformist organizations. The acceptance that some NGOs are 'complicit' with corruption paints a picture that fully-fledged organizations devoid of the vice are hard to come by, thus compounding the problem.

The Role of Political Will and Leadership

Another common theme was a strong political will and leadership that would improve by the end of the study. This is the reason why participants are claiming that if political leadership is not willing to fight corruption fully, the process will not be successful.

"For years, we have been witnessing cases when show is made out of the anti-corruption measures and when there is no real commitment from the top."

This quote reveals political leaders' hypocrisy in making grand promises, which they never implement to the letter. The phrase "just for show" means that anti-corruption campaigns mean little and are often a mere facade to give an impression of fighting corruption. The absence of 'real commitment' of leaders is therefore proposed as one of the key challenges to a robust reform.

"The formation of the KPK was a positive move, but attempts to undermine it in recent years prove that political will is not cast in stone, especially when there is no strong leadership to back it up".

Here, the participant applauds formation of KPK as a positive feature but at the same time argues that its success depends on sustained political will. This leads to the consideration of the political will as a powerful yet easily diminished force, where actions to undermine its authority come across as no more than 'Efforts to weaken its powers'. This highlights the importance of longer-term commitment from leadership in the context of anti-corruption initiatives and support to relevant institutions.

"Yes, leadership does count but leadership that is able to fight corruption to its l0r and to make the right decisions even if these decisions are going to be unpopular is the kind of leadership we need".

This quote helps to draw a clear between formal and real authority. The participant also stated that it would be great if the leaders could be willing to make some of the decisions which may not be popular but should fight corruption. As such, there is a call for ethical and bold leadership that seeks to drive long-sustained change rather than going for political gains.

Institutional Challenges and Fragmentation

They also showed the crucial deficiencies connected to the institutional capacity and the departmentalized approach to anti-corruption. People pointed out that while organizational efforts are crucial, absent harmonized and well thought out measures, then anti-corruption campaigns will not work.

"Some of the major issues that we face include duplication of efforts since everyone is working individually and, in some cases,, agencies are even competing with each other."

More serious is the problem of institutional dispersion, where the agencies work in a very coordinated way mostly conflicting with each other. The use of phrase 'work against each other' implies that some of the approaches used to fight corruption are in fact deleterious or self-defeating, hence the requirement for better coordinated measures.

"We have agreed with our world leaders to have good laws and good legislations, the problem is with the implementation since the institutions are not helping."

This observation raises the question about the difference between written anti-corruption laws and their implementation, which is a well-documented problem. As for the "disconnect", this implies that the laws are not implemented and monitored as it is beneficial for them to do. This shows why governments should not only develop sound laws, but also institute that can effectively implement such laws.

"It seems that the KPK is trying their best; however, they are bogged down. This is due to several reasons; the KPK lacks funds or any form of support that could enable it to fight corruption as it is manifest in Indonesia".

The following quote portrays a clear indication of the scarce resources available to principal anti-corruption institutions such as the KPK. As applied to corruption, the usage of the word 'overwhelmed' conveys the impression that the extent of the corruption problem can barely be tackled by current institutions. This suggests that there is need for more resources in the form

of funding and human resource to support anti corruption measures; there is need for support from institution in enhancing the measures that work against corruption.

The Impact of Corruption on Society and Economic Development

In addition, corruption was said to cause injustice and hinder the development of a society, something that has been alluded to by the participants.

“For instance, when funds are embezzled it would affect the most vulnerable in the society, those who depend on the public services”. (Civil Society Leader)

This quote shows how corruption cuts across the ladder and in the worst way possible affects the helpless in society. Private capital generation discards public services hence worsening social inequality as it affects the needy such as the less fortunate in the health and education sectors. This makes it even more paramount a reason for fighting corruption given the moral and ethical angles that are involved out to a social front.

“This is how corruption hinders economic growth: corruption undermines confidence; ‘why should I invest in a country where I would have to part with some cash in order to make the government do its work?’”

This quote attributed corruption to stagnation particularly in relation to investment. The participant notes that corruption makes business environment unfriendly to investors including those from within the country and those within the foreign countries. Such correlation between corruption and fewer economical prospects of a country underlines the spectrum of the economical losses that corruption occasions for the nation.

“First of all, corruption has impacts on the economy and people’s trust in government institutions, yet corruption is a violation of the principles of democracy because people turn to leaders and see them get involved in corrupt acts”.

regime: This statement relates corruption with the decline of democracy and democratic institutions. Another effect of corruption is the breakdown in people’s trust in their government since they do not believe in the electoral process or democratic governance. This suggests that corruption and increased corruption levels have a wider impact to society than loss of money in that it also undermines the societies social contract and democracy.

The study findings corroborate literature evidence on the high degree of permeation of corruption in the public and even the private domain. One of the participants used the metaphor of corruption as a “virus;” arguing that corruption has become systemic and ingrained at the Indonesian societal level as highlighted by Pertiwi & Ainsworth (2021). This systemic nature makes it challenging to erase corrupt practices from the environment since they change the entire socio-political culture of the country.

Bribery and collusions as portrayed by the participants are manifested in the private sector, and this validates the study by Van den Heuvel (2005) that seen bribery and collusions as normal business practices. Perceiving corruption as a necessity in the private sector means that the change of the deeply entrenched behaviours, widely regarded as the key to success in a competitive economy, is going to be a difficult endeavour. This corresponds to the research of Orudzheva et al. (2020) who mentioned that corruption itself can be reinforced in firms when it is regarded as a normative practice. Furthermore, the admission of corruption with the civil society organizations is rather shocking, given that these organizations are normally expected to fight the vice and bring change. This lends support to the assertion of Persson et al. (2010), who have pointed out the danger which arises out of coerced civil society participation in corruption related initiatives. This put into question the monitoring of these civil society organizations and their operations, this therefore calls for closer monitor but for them to be independent and not influenced by corrupt officials or parties.

The importance of political will and leadership in the fight against corruption as identified in this study and by other scholars is well demonstrated. Referring to Kpundeh (2004), it must be

stated that without proper political support and commitment, it is impossible to achieve real results in combating corruption. Nevertheless, this research demonstrates the gap between the anti corruption discourse and practice, which corresponds to Tucker (1995) claims that unless the leaders become committed to addressing the issue, the measures are mere tokens. Political will is seen to be easily shaken as evidenced by the case of the KPK that has faced several threats to its existence. While discussing why political support for anti corruption agencies had been inconsistent in the past years, the study's participants noted that the recent attempts to undermine the KPK. This is in line with the study done by Fjeldstad & Isaksen (2008) pointing out that political interferences are still the biggest challenges that face anti-corruption institutions in the country. The implications are clear: corruption can be easily fought from the center only when there exists a sincere political will otherwise, the sturdiest anti-corruption institutions are only a decoration, which does not work.

Moreover, the participants' reported the scarcity of ethical and courageous leadership to complete the solution, such that Phahlane (2021) claim that ethical leadership is critical to implementing anti-corruption solutions as part of the solution. Leaders have to demonstrate anti corrupt practices at workplace as well as be ready to make hard and unpopular decisions that will help curb corruption. This paper has identified that leadership development should form part of anti corruption measures as future leaders have to be provided with the moral backbone not to indulge in corrupt practices.

The results pointing out the institutional difficulties and fragmentation show that there is a demand for more coherence of anti-corruption initiatives. Participants' report of delayed or insufficient communication between agencies resembles a more general phenomenon of institutional dissociation, which has been discussed in prior research. Saraswati (2019) observed that most of the Indonesia's strategy on anticorruption is fragmented, neoliberal techniques that are directed by different agencies and maybe incongruous with one another. Another major factor which emerged in the study and is also a major challenge of anti-corruption efforts, is the gap that exists between legislation and enforcement. This is an issue that is not peculiar to Indonesia alone it is typical of many developing countries wherein there are laws, but mechanisms to enforce them remains embryonic largely due to institutional untenability. The conclusion reached in this study therefore is that there is a realisation of the need to have not only efficient laws but also enforceable laws within a society but there is the lack of support institutions that realizes the cooperation of enforcing these laws.

From the discussions carried out by the participants it is evident that the workload exerted on the KPK is overwhelming, thus supporting the call for institutional strengthening. As highlighted by Kireri et al. (2021), professionals especially those in anti corruption agencies need to have the right funding and human resources. Today's underfunding of the KPK points to the fact that with these institutions' investment in Indonesia remaining so low they will not be able to effectively respond to the scale of the corruption problem. This calls for more system level reforms that enhance the capacity and sustainability of anti-corruption institutions.

As noted in a number of previous studies, the results of this research most strongly underscore the negative effects of corruption on both society and the economy. According to the findings of the participants, corruption has a differential impact on the poor, which has been supported by Keneck-Massil et al. (2021) that corruption leads to worsening in income inequality because of the channeling of resources through corruption from financing adequate social services. The conclusion that corruption reduces economic growth by discouraging investment is also coherent with the results reported by Afonso & de Sá Fortes Leitão Rodrigues (2022) whereby corruption was observed to have negative and statistically significant impact on economic growth. In the same respect, the participants' sheds light on the fact that corruption adversely affects democratic governance through the erosion of public trust in the government. According to Näsström (2021), corruption invalidates people's trust in governmental institutions and weakened the social contract that exists between the government and the governed. According to this study, in the Indonesian context, corruption not only undermines the growth of

economy but also, undermines the essence of democracy, including people's participation in decision-making processes.

Such anti-social effects of corruption such as perpetuating of inequity and social inequity should inform future policies for any nation. The indications are that anti-corruption measures require looking at the issue comprehensively; this means that poverty, inequality, and weak rule of law, which are some of the causes of corruption, have to be fought as well. This approach can therefore only be implemented through a multi faceted approach that will involve economic, social and institutional changes that will prevent corruption from growing.

CONCLUSION

The result of research presented in this paper indicates that corruption is deeply rooted in Indonesia with enormous barriers that pose a vice like grip to the efforts to combat it. Subsequently corruption is manifested not only in the public sector but also in the private one; CSOs also play a role in corruption thus it can be deduced that fighting against this problem needs more than a single solution. Political will and leadership was identified as a significant factor contributing to the effectiveness or otherwise of anti-corruption measures. However, empty political promises and lip service has diminished the effect of institutions such as the KPK thereby rendering them rightwards politically dominated. This goes to show that there is need for continual, authentic political stewardship, devoid of political expediency. This is worsened by the fact that most agencies are usually fragmented institutions with little to no coherent interaction between them. It was established that while there is legal protection for children's rights, there is poor implementation and inadequate implementation institutions. For these endeavours to be successful, there is a need to enhance institutional synergy and ensure that anti-corruption institutions are well equipped and funded. Generally people can suffer huge losses through corruption since it leads to increased inequalities and loss of public trust. Corruption not only stifles economic growth by deterring investment but also undermines the social contract and democratic governance, further destabilizing the country.

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