“NORMAL” CORRUPTION IN THE GHANAIAN PUBLIC SERVICE  
HINDERING NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  

INTRODUCTION  

Corruption, according to wikipedia, may include many activities including bribery and embezzlement and can be classify as petty, grand and systemic. Government, or political, corruption occurs when an office-holder or other governmental employee acts in an official capacity for his or her own personal gain. Corruption breaks your trustworthiness, your good reputation with others, and when you corrupt something that is pure or honest, you take away those qualities.  

The issue of corruption has dominated many sectors of the Ghanaian Public Service in recent times. A careful look through the Auditor General’s reports over the years show the recklessness among public officers in handling the resources that have been allocated to them to play their role of national development. The major issues that are very common with all the Ministries, Departments, Agencies and other Governmental Institutions are severe irregularities with Cash Management, Procurement Management and Contract Management. All the above three are the major mismanagements among public officials, which only lead to the improvement in the wellbeing of the individual public officers and other private individuals to the detriment of the national development.  

Many International Bodies, Foreign Governments and International Non-Governmental Organizations have been pumping money into the developmental efforts of our country for several years with the intent of making the ordinary person better off after the implementation of the programs. It is however unfortunate that many of these ordinary persons hardly see any improvement at all, in their lives, after the implementation of such projects. One can talk about the efforts by UN, IMF and DFID in the utilization and administration of public funds of the country’s Ministry of Finance. There were also many efforts by several organizations like UNICEF, UNDP, USAID, CIDA, FOCUS, etc to improve the health of the ordinary Ghanaian or give better quality education to the children, but many of these efforts do not see the light of day as will be desired by the donors because many of the program implementers collaborate to ensure that their personal interest is made paramount to that of the innocent ordinary persons for which the donor organization has targeted her funds. The individual Ghanaian has become so selfish such that the spirit of Nationalism which used to be the bane of majority of Ghanaians has dwindled to its lowest level. Everybody is just trying to make himself rich at the disadvantage of the national interest and no one seems to care.  

THE ROLE OF MONITORING INSTITUTIONS  

Unfortunately the institutions that are put in place to ensure the right things are done can sometimes be described as being in bed with the perpetrators, if not all the time, or only sitting on the fence while they watch the rot continued because of fear of losing their jobs. For example, CHRAJ is an institution that has to ensure, among other things, that the individual right is
protected at all times and if they are well functioning some ethical public workers could easily
report corrupt officials within their institutions and will be sure of protection from intimidation
and fear of losing their jobs. The EOCO is empowered to ensure that fraudulent activities are
reduced among public operations including money laundering, but how sure is the ordinary
person who walks into the office of the EOCO to report a fraudulent deal by a public officer that
he will not be victimized the next day by the perpetrators? The list goes on and for that matter
it’s becoming obvious that corruption is a communal cancer and can never be uprooted from the
community unless concrete efforts are made to tackle corruption.

The Controller and Accountant General Department, who is responsible for the management of
the public purse have various category of staff who collaborate with private and public
individuals to siphon huge sums of money from the public purse for their personal gains. Some
of them collaborate with these individuals to pay monthly salaries to people who are not working
at any public organization (so called ghosts). Others collaborate with some service providers like
suppliers and contractors of government projects to issue cheques for either works not done or
for amounts far above the contract prices.

The Auditor General Department has a supervisory responsibility to ensure that the public purse
is not dissipated to the detriment of national development. They do this by conducting periodic
audit of the financial operations of the various institutions and report to the Parliament for
necessary actions. Unfortunately, however, the work of the Auditor General has several
challenges. Among the several challenges are their capacity to conduct, at least, annual audit on
all public departments and institutions to ensure regular monitoring. Some institutions could
have their accounts audited after four or five years during which period the rot has been so rotten
that either the corrupt practices are covered or so much hidden from them such that their reports
are cosmetic rather than revealing the true nature of events on the ground. It is worth noting that
the activities of the Auditor General can be likened to that of the pathologist who tried to find out
the cause of death. The financial rot had already occurred and it will be very difficult for the
Auditor General to revert or prevent its occurrence, just as the pathologist cannot bring back the
dead to life.

Even if they find out any substantial mismanagement at all (as what we have been seeing in their
previous reports), the little that is revealed only ends up at the desk of a parliamentary committee
known as the Public Account Committee (PAC). This toothless committee only has the power of
calling Directors or Accountants of the institutions affected by the report and question them on
National Television without any powers to neither reprimand nor prosecute or the efforts to get
moneys refunded to the state.

THE ROLE OF ORDINARY GHANAIANS

Most at times we the ordinary citizens just stand by and watch public servants living an opulent
life but we never care to ask how they made their money to warrant such living. These
communal receptions for “an ordinary public official turn into community celebrity after few
months” have become an encouraging factor for the youth to see corruption as normal. As a
result, many people with high level of moral and ethical believes, who have the national interest at heart, have lost hope in the possibility of seeing the country developed to their desired level in a lifetime. This is very obvious because the nation is losing millions of Ghanaian cedi into the individual’s pocket while the developmental drive of the country is stalled.

Recently a Deputy Minister responsible for Communications lamented on her facebook timeline regarding how people are putting pressure on her to still from the state’s purse and pass on some to them. This post generated series of debate on various radio stations with some calling her timid, coward and others referring to her as not qualified to be a politician. The very last description of this lady, who is trying to be an ethical politician, drew my mind to two questions. (1) If this lady succumbed to the pressure coming from these people and steals from the public purse, wont the ordinary Ghanaian surfer and those reckless individuals putting the pressure on her be rejoicing? (2) Is it the ordinary Ghanaian who makes the Politician or the Public Servant corrupt and for that matter must be left to suffer the consequences?

THE COST OF CORRUPTION TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The country needs very good road network, 21st century railway system, very good schools, well equipped public transportation system, and many more that will put Ghana as the hub of business link to the rest of West Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. Even though these developmental projects mentioned require huge financial commitments and for that matter need serious financial strategies to raise such funds, the various amounts dissipated by government officials and public servants could go a long way to lay the foundations for some of these projects if not completing some few of them fully.

For example, in the 2010 Auditor General’s Reports, there was huge amounts of irregularities at the Management and Utilization of the District Assembly Common Funds; The Public Accounts of Ministries, Departments and Agencies and The Public Accounts of Corporations and Other Statutory Institutions, which ended in the pockets of individuals to the detriment of the national developmental agenda. In review of the reports on the above three government agencies out of a lot of others in the year 2010, there was a total of GHe180,218,208. Out of this GHe180 million, about GHe162 million representing 90 percent was as a results of cash irregularities, which are mostly unaccounted for cash that probably were spent by the individuals for mostly no work done. The rest 10 percent was as a result of contract irregularities and procurement and stores irregularities.

It is generally believed that these three blare areas in the administration of public funds (cash, procurement and contract management) are normally used by public officials to defraud the state of at the peril of the national development. The above mentioned amounts might not sound very huge to some people compare to the national budget but for the ordinary pregnant woman who wants to get access to good medical care or the young person in the village who wants quality education so s/he can also make some earnings in the future to take care of the parents, this is a huge amount that can do a lot to enhance our national developmental agenda.
Moreover, when one considered the fact that this figure of \textbf{GHc180 million} represents only three out of the many such reports of the Auditor General’s Department for 2010 one will consider this figure very gargantuan. Unfortunately however, the nation can never be guaranteed to get any part of this money back, since this has been going on for many years. Various Auditor General’s Reports over the years had similar recommendations which have never been used by any supervisory authority to ensure that moneys lost to the state are retrieved. Like I said earlier, the country’s Parliamentary Committee on public funds, PAC, has no powers at all for coming to the rescues of the many poor and ordinary tax payers to help recover the moneys mismanaged by these state wreckers, who are bent of ensuring that the milking cow drops dead while they go about enjoying their booty with their families and friends.

It is for the above and many other reasons that there needed to be a serious national and apolitical debate on the issue of corruption to ensure that we have proactive and feasible solutions to this cancer. We as a country have to decide if we want to move the nation forward within the global community, we have to wage a serious war on corruptions whiles working very hard to keep ourselves above waters.

\textbf{SOME RECOMMENDATIONS/SOLUTIONS}

In my candid opinion, we need to give serious consideration to the activities of internal auditors by empowering them with necessary equipments and authority that will grant them the acceptable level of independence for them to execute their duties. Internal auditing activities can be likened to that of the surgeon, who has special skills to prevent death occurrences. They ensure that the proper rules and regulations are followed and the financial administrative works are in accordance with acceptable procedures. After the Enron and various similar scandals in the United States of America, the work of the internal auditor has become very vital to many corporate and state organizations. More independence was given to them and technical training given to them to ensure that stakeholders’ wealth is protected at all times. The spate of corruption in Ghana can be described as scandalous at these particular times. It is for this reason that I suggest the adoption of the USA type of vigorous Internal Auditing, with powers to report to very higher authorities and their operational budgets should not depend on the entity with which they are working. If properly planned and implemented, the activities of skillful internal auditors would go a long way to safeguard the public purse to ensure that the current massive nature of corruption will be reduced drastically.

My second recommendation to the powers that be is the ability of the Public Account Committee to refer perpetrators of financial crimes for immediate prosecution. As stated earlier, the work of the PAC is most at times telecast on national television and for that matter many of offenders and potential offenders watch the proceeding with keen interest, I believe. The PAC should therefore be given such powers that have them investigate various infractions brought before them. After various questioning and grilling, the Chairman and his team could recommend an offending officer for prosecutions. Such offending officers pronounced for prosecution by the PAC should be seen been led by the security officers to police custody for the prosecutorial process to begin immediately. This single act, watched by the whole nation will go a long way to deter many
potential offenders as many will be scared of being seen by the whole world, including their families, being let to custody for standing against the developmental agenda of this great nation.

Finally, we need to initiate efforts to start vigorous anti-corruption campaign at schools in the primary and Junior High level. An old adage said that “If the head is rotten, it is easy for the rot to affect the whole body than if the leg is rotten”. Most at time we target our anti-corruption campaign at those who are already buried in the corrupt act and have been enjoying the fruits of corruption so find it very difficult to refrain from the acts. They might have lived certain level of life as a result of the corrupt practices and for that matter can never revert to a lower life. So all efforts to educate such persons to ensure that corrupt practices are stopped is just like pouring water on a hard rock with the hope that the rock will sock the water one day. This is very impossible and will for that matter yield no significant results.

Many people in the public administrative system are either corrupt already or are looking for the opportunity to engage in one corrupt act or the other. For these reasons, it would be very important to direct our anti-corruption campaign towards the little once at their tender ages. We need to show them what corruption has done and is continuing to be doing to our nation. We need to seriously instill moral and ethical behaviors in them from those tender ages and ensure them of the fruits of hard work and the need of their services to the nation Ghana. Our children need to be groomed to understand that life is worth living in a country where opportunities are equally abound to all who are ready to put their efforts to the wheel. This may be one of the important antidotes that will help clean our public institutions together with the institutionalization of moral ethics among our teaming youth, may be from primary levels all the way through to the tertiary levels.

CONCLUSIONS

We all have been sitting down for too long a time on the issue of corruption because many of us are culprits and for that matter will like to talk about it but make little or no effort to implement any program or policy to reduce it. We are very selfish people who love ourselves more than our country. We think only about today and what we can enjoy rather than looking into the future beyond our life-times and committing acts that we know very well are detrimental to the future generations. We are very happy to hit our chest of what we do for our families but very few of us can do same with reference to our country. But it is about time we all put our efforts to the wheel and ensure we roll until we reach to pick of the hill. Our people living in the slums must have good and healthy life, our children must be assured of better future, our teaming youth must have the assurance of getting well meaning jobs after school and our beloved country Ghana deserves better and we can make it happened today.

Mr. George Ekegey Ekeha
Member, Institute of Internal Auditors (Ghana)
Email: ekegey24ge@yahoo.co.uk, Tel: 0249529947/0509931755