

"THE SILENT EPIDEMIC: WHY CORRUPTION REMAINS UNREPORTED"



The latest corruption perception index released 2024 has Uganda ranked as the fourth most corrupt country in East African Community EAC where it has maintained a score of 26 for the past two years, after it dropped from 28 in 2019. The index has also ranked South Sudan the most corrupt in the region, followed by Somalia, Burundi and DRC which is partly attributed to existing instabilities in some of the countries. Institutionally, Uganda police remains the most corrupt, followed by the Judiciary, tax services and the land service sectors according to the National Integrity Survey.

ABOUT CORRUPTION IN UGANDA

The IGG cost of Corruption report 2021 estimates an annual loss of UGX9.14tn. This loss is from public resources meant for essential services such as Health, Education and Infrastructure development. In Uganda, corruption remains a persistent challenge, threatening the country's socio-economic development, eroding public trust in government institutions, and hindering efforts to build a transparent and accountable society. Despite concerted efforts to combat corruption, endemic issues persist, prompting calls for renewed action and systemic reforms to root out this pervasive scourge.

Corruption in Uganda manifests in various forms, including bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, abuse of power, and illicit enrichment. It permeates all levels of society, from government offices to private businesses, and affects sectors such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and law enforcement.

The impact of corruption is far-reaching, exacerbating poverty, inequality, and social injustice, and undermining the rule of law and democratic governance. According to the National Service delivery Survey 2021, 33.5% of respondent's believe corruption takes place in the public sector. The commonest forms of corruption reported according to the survey are Bribery 17%, embezzlement 13 %, Favoritism 11 % and nepotism 10%. 69% of respondents according to this survey believed that corruption had increased while only 22% reported that it had remained the same.



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“Combating corruption in Uganda faces numerous challenges, including weak institutional capacity, limited resources, lack of political will, and entrenched patronage networks. The judiciary and law enforcement agencies often face pressure and interference from political elites. Additionally, impunity for corrupt officials, coupled with a culture of silence and fear of reprisal, hampers efforts to hold perpetrators accountable and deter future wrongdoing. Over the years, Uganda has witnessed several high-profile corruption scandals that have sparked public outrage and demands for accountability. Cases involving mismanagement of public funds, fraudulent procurement practices, and abuse of office have drawn scrutiny and condemnation from civil society, media, and international observers. While some perpetrators have been prosecuted and convicted, many cases languish in judicial limbo, fueling perceptions of impunity and fostering disillusionment among citizens.”

WHAT ACTIONS ARE CURRENTLY BEING UNDERTAKEN?

- The Ugandan government has taken steps to address corruption through legislative reforms, institutional strengthening, and awareness-raising campaigns. The establishment of anti-corruption agencies such as the Inspectorate of Government and the Anti-Corruption Units within State House demonstrates a commitment to tackling corruption at the highest levels.
- Additionally, the enactment of laws such as the Anti-Corruption Act and the Whistleblower Protection Act aims to provide legal frameworks for prosecuting corrupt practices and protecting whistleblowers. According to the National Household Survey, Citizens are aware of public anti corruption agencies including; the Uganda Police, Parliament and the Judiciary taking 89 percent, 66 percent, and 34 percent of the households respectively. Others known include the Inspectorate of Government (16%), Office of the Auditor General (3.4%), Directorate Of Public Prosecution (3.5%), Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets (1.5%), Financial Intelligence Authority (0.6%), and State House Anti-Corruption Unit(13%). These institutions mentioned are less than half of the existing anticorruption agencies in Uganda.

Despite mentioning the impressive knowledge of institutions, the low level of knowledge about the anti-corruption efforts reveals a significant gap in public sensitization. On the other hand, findings indicate that public institutions mainly engage with the public on occurrence of corruption, but such engagements do not involve taking a deliberate effort to inform the public about the existence, relevance and efforts of accountability institutions. Due to ignorance, the people find it difficult to access the services, leading to limited societal will to support the government in the fight against corruption. There are gaps in linkage between peoples' knowledge about an anti-corruption institution and the level of their awareness about the work done by it.

Most households in Uganda do not know most of the anti-corruption institutions as well as their efforts in combating corruption. Limited knowledge limits level of Societal willingness and involvement to support Government in the anti-corruption fight. This is worsened by low levels of mass education and sensitization on fraud and embezzlement. There is need to establish whether poor sensitization is caused by lack of commitment by the leadership, which could be highly risky for realization of the anti-corruption aspirations. Further, leadership willingness to stem corruption is challenged by the high levels of inaction against culprits of real or perceived misuse of funds at various levels, potentially leading to a conclusion that leadership might be tolerant to corruption.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

- **Translation of the anti-corruption laws** to promote understanding of the laws through a simplified version.
- **Strengthening community education and sensitization.** About 54 percent and 70 percent of the parishes/LC.II and Sub counties/LC.III leadership engaged the citizens on education and sensitization about government programs. It is notable that less than one percent of the education/sensitization conducted in 2021 was on fraud and embezzlement.
- **Engage the media as watchdogs** to exposing corruption scandals and raising awareness about the detrimental effects of corruption on society
- **protecting whistleblowers**, promoting access to information, and fostering citizen participation in governance processes.