SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC CAUSES OF CORRUPTION AND CHALLENGES IN ITS CONTROL IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

This study is based on descriptive research methodology and employed structured questionnaire tools to obtained data and information. A survey sample was confirmed through purposive sampling and sample unit was 100 respondents. Who were officers and staff currently working in the offices of the CIAA, NVC, CIB, and DAO, all of them were primarily responsible for investigative research and action to combat with corruption in Nepal. The quantitative data were analyzed using simple statistical tools and MS excel particularly. Qualitative data were analyzed constructing theme and using Word Cloud to visualize subjective information. Based on the objective, data revealed that corruption is significantly increasing in current time though Nepal government structured so many mechanisms to control corruption. Similarly, the most common forms of corruption identified were bribery, embezzlement, and nepotism correspondingly. The most common cause of corruption is political in Nepal. In the same way significant number of respondents opined that Money is everything type of believe system, erosion on moral ethics and values and no social boycott of corrupt people are three socio-economic cause of corruption. Likewise Political interference, Lack of

enforcement, institutional corruption are the big challenges to control corruption in Nepal. The study highlights strategic focus on to control political corruption; strengthen public policy and anti-corruption strategies to foster the transparency. This study also paved the way to the research hers to conduct further study relating to anti-corruption and good governance initiatives in Nepal.

Keywords: Corruption, Anti-corruption Law, Bribery, Political Interference, Socio-economic Factors

1.   INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a general term that encompasses a wide range of abuse or misuse of entrusted funds and power for personal or private gains (Graycar & Sidebottom, 2012). It is considered a wrongdoing, a behavioral challenge, and an ethical dilemma that calls for personal transformation. Transparency International (2024) defines corruption as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain." Here, "abuse" refers to misuse or mistreatment, and "entrusted power" refers to authority granted to duty bearers and decision makers on the premise that they act with integrity to advance the public good (TI, 2024), and "private gain" refers to the self-serving benefits (financial, material, political or social) that accrue to individual or specific interest groups at the expense of society at large. The legal definition of corruption in broad scene is as an act of bribery involving a public servant and a transfer of tangible resources (Mathew & Barnabas, 1996).

The corruption can happen in several forms. The main forms of corruption are bribery, embezzlement, fraud, and extortion (Khan, 2006). Even when these concepts are partly overlapping and at times interchangeable with other concepts, some of the basic characteristics of corruption can be identified through these concepts (Svensson, 2005). The Prevention of Corruption Act 2002 AD is the primary legal document that described different types of corruption. The act describes various types of corruption in existence and their identification as a criminal offense. The act identifies bribery, money laundering, abuse of office and facilitation payments in the public and private sectors (TI, 2017).

There are several causes of corruption. The root causes of corruption are bad systems of governance (Klitgaard, 1988). There is little chance of getting caught. This comes primarily from a lack of transparency. Lack of accountability is also the cause of rampant corruption (Lambsdorff, 2007). Another equally important cause of corruption is bad incentive. Although public employs take oath before joining the duty they do not get adequate level of anti-corruption related specific

education and training that is another cause of corruption. In the context of political economy of Nepal, though Nepal is considered as Federal Democratic Republican country and power and resources decentralized in to different constituent bodies, corruption is localized and connected to different bodies rather than control (Ghimire, 2018). Corruption is also taken as a social phenomenon where the events are exposed in several ways such as; social, political, psychological, cultural, and religious and other subjective factors. However, most of the researches are focused on administrative and economic aspect of corruption.

The Prevention of Corruption Act, 2002, in its Chapter-2, provisioned several offences of corruption and punishment. This Act has established a comprehensive legal framework to combat corruption, including the Anti-Corruption Act and the Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) Act. The CIAA is the apex constitutional body that plays a crucial role in investigating corruption cases, files corruption cases in Special Court for appropriate punitive actions and promoting integrity within government institutions (Karki, 2018& Shrestha, 2019). Similarly, despite the existence of anti-corruption, official policy of zero tolerance towards corruption, political party leaders and government authorities routinely speak out against corruption and vibrant communication Medias enforcement remains weak due to limited resources, inadequate training, and a lack of political will (WB, 2020& Shrestha 2019).

According to Transparency International the global coalition against corruption Nepal received 35 score ranks 107 out of 180 countries (TI, 2023). This shows that corruption is widespread, massive and reflected in multiple forms in Nepal. In this background, this study aims to identify the causes and challenges to control corruption in the context of Nepal and attempt to answer following research questions:

a.   What are the socio-economic causes of corruption in Nepal?

b.   What are the major challenges to control corruption in Nepal?

Based on the research question the specific objectives are designed as such;

a.   To determine the socio-Cultural and economic causes of corruption in Nepal

b.   To analyze challenges to control corruption in Nepal

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Corruption is complex and multifaceted phenomenon, has been conceptualized and defined in various ways in the sociological literature. Understanding these diverse perspectives is crucial for framing the sociological analysis of anti-corruption efforts in Nepal. The manifestation of corruption in developing countries, including Nepal, is often shaped by unique contextual factors. Pokharel (2019) explores how historical legacies, weak institutions, and economic disparities contribute to the persistence of corruption in Nepal. Understanding these contextual factors is essential for a nuanced sociological analysis.

As the similar kind different scholars have defined different forms of corruption such as:

a.   **Petty Corruption:** This type of corruption is about only a small amount of benefit exchanged between the taker and the giver. According to Schwenke (2005), such corruption involves the use of small managerial functions for corruption and outside work rather than the use of authority.

b.   **Grant Corruption:** Grand corruption is a transition of large amount and benefit between the receiver and giver. Skilled people who are at the top level policy making are complicit in such corruption. Both the giver and receiver benefit from this (TI, 2023)

c.   **Systematic Corruption:** In systemic corruption, any institution or organization is completely involved in corrupt activities. Bogovicet. Al. (2010), the structure of any organization is designed to be conductive to corruption and the organization itself in encouraging corruption in a planned manner.

d.   **Administrative Corruption:** Administrative corruption refers to corruption committed by employees working in public administration. Bureaucracy does things like extorting money from private sector businesses and firms, not doing any work without a bribe or some money (Coats, 2005).

As we know, corruption is as a socially constructed phenomenon influenced by cultural, political, historical and power dynamic factors. Social constructionist theories emphasize how corruption is defined, perceived, and reacted to within society. Scott (1978), Hacking (1999), and Schmidt (2013) provide insights into the

social construction of deviance, including corruption. As well there are multiple factors and causes that lead to corruption include weak institutional frameworks (Bjornskov, 2011), inadequate anti-corruption measures and enforcement (Cao and Shi 2021), a lack of transparency and accountability (Jain, 2001), low wages and high-income inequality among public officials (Doh, Rodriguez, Uhlenbruck, Collins, and Eden, 2003), and cultural and social norms that tolerate, encourage and challenge to control corruption (Mungiu, 2015).

According to the study, as the types and causes of corruption have increased, the challenges of controlling corruption are also increasing. Moreover, Tan-Mullins & Hofman (2014) identified lack of political will and enforcement capacity as key challenges in anti-corruption efforts. Even In the south Asian context since 1980s, Indian, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani presidents and prime ministers have been charged in court with corruption. Additionally, the media and political opponents of Sri Lanka's and Nepal's prime ministers frequently accused them of corruption (Thapa, 2023)

The challenges of anti-corruption can be broadly explained in terms of legal and operational challenges. Operational challenges cover operational parameters, coordination, and harmonization challenges facing the investigation initiatives, lack of anti-corruption programs where legal challenges include definition of corruption in Act, a poor conception of the meaning of corruption, limited mandate to the law enforcement agencies (Amukowa, 2013). In Nepal, Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) is considered as a powerful institution enabled by the constitution as a constitutional body that can investigate and prosecute the authorities of public sector involved in the alleged corruption.

As the similar vein, different theoretical perspectives differently define and analyze the corruption. According to Institutional Theory, corruption is influenced by the institutional context, including the effectiveness of anti-corruption laws, the strength of regulatory bodies, and the presence of accountability mechanisms (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Applying institutional theory to the study of corruption in Nepal allows for an exploration of how existing institutions contribute to the perpetuation or prevention of corrupt practices. Political Economy Theory emphasis is that Corruption is often analyzed in the context of power structures and economic inequalities, with a focus on how elites use their positions for personal gain. Marx (1867) provided foundational insights into the political economy, and Nye (1967) discussed corruption as a result of power imbalances.

According to Social Capital Theory social capital influences corruption through

informal networks that facilitate collusion and corrupt practices. Putnam (1993) and Coleman (1988) contributed to the understanding of social capital and its implications. Cultural Theory views that Cultural factors influence societal attitude toward corruption, determining whether certain behaviors are tolerated or condemned. Huntington (1968) and Banfield (1958) discussed political culture and amoral feminism in relation to corruption. Similarly, rational choice theory posits that individuals make decisions based on a rational assessment of costs and benefits. Examining corruption through the lens of rational choice theory provides insights into the motivations and decision-making processes of corrupt actors in the Nepalese context (Becker, 1968).

These theories establish a foundation for understanding corruption as a social phenomenon and establishes the conceptual framework for examining corruption in Nepal, drawing on theories that emphasize societal structures, interactions, influences, and diverse theoretical perspectives to provide a comprehensive understanding of corruption in this study.

3.   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive research methodology, which involves specifying the research issue, understanding its real-world context. Self-administered survey questionnaire were the major tools of primary data collection in this research study. The questionnaires were distributed among the staffs and officers working in the agencies like Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA), National Vigilance Center (NVC), Central Investigation Bureau (CIB), and District Administration Office (DAO), working as investigative research, action and play the direct role in anti-corruption efforts. The questionnaires were distributed offline in printed form as well as online through email in Google forms. With acknowledging the limitation, a total of 100 Samples were collected purposively as per the nature and orientation of the study. Among them 65 were collected offline and 35 online. Out of 100 samples 51 samples were collected from CIAA, 10 from CIB, 12 from DAO, 16 from PMO and 11 from others. The questionnaire implies primarily close ended questions and few open-ended questions to obtain the free opinion. MS excel and word cloud (www.worditout.com) was used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative forms of data respectively. Word cloud is often used in qualitative research to visualize subjective form of information to identify recurring themes and key words.

4.   RESULTS

A total of 100 samples were collected during the study. The data were exported to suitable platform like MS Excel for graphical presentation and suitably analyzed keeping the research objectives in center.

Background Information of Respondents

As per the objective and nature of the study the respondents were selected purposively according to their active age group, position, focus work areas and work experience accordingly. Having a position of an officer or above have a role as well as authority to investigate the corruption case as well as file a corruption case in the court whereas the person in Assistant can assist investigation officer has a clerical role in such cases. The detailed demographic distribution of the respondents has been reported in the Table 1.

Table 1. *Background of Respondents*

S.N	Description	Frequency	Total	Percentage
1	**Age**			
	20-30 Years	7	100	7%
	31-40 Years	59	100	59%
	41-50 years	19	100	19%
	Above 50 years	15	100	15%
2	**Position of the Respondents**			
	Assistant	14	100	14%
	Officer	50	100	50%
	Under Secretary	28	100	28%
	Joint Secretary	8	100	8%
3	**Work focus of the Respondents**			
	Investigation	83	100	83%
	Prosecution	4	100	4%

	Vigilance	2	100	2%
	Monitoring	10	100	10%
	Other	1	100	1%
4	**Work Experience**			
	< 5 years	25	100	25%
	5-10 years	37	100	37%
	10-15 years	18	100	18%
	>15 years	20	100	20%

Source: Survey, 2024

Respondent as per age group, position of employment, area of work focus, and years of professional experience are categorized and presented in the table. The distributions of respondents as per their age-group were: 7% 20-30 years, 59% 31-40 years, 19% 41-50 years, and 15% above 50 years of age. As per the civil service act, every civil servant has to retire after completion of 58 years. Similarly, collected data shows that the respondents as per their employment level 14% belonged to Assistant, 50% Section Officers, 28% Under Secretaries, and 8% Joint Secretaries. Out of total respondents' majority 83% were involved in investigation of corruption related activities, 10% in monitoring of corruption related events, 4% in prosecution related activities of corruption cases and 3% were at vigilance work.

Regarding the years of experience in civil service, majority of the respondents belong to 5-10 years of experience, 25% respondents were of less than 5 years of civil service experience, 18% belonged to 10 to 15 years of experience, and 20% above had more than 15 years of experience in civil service. Such a category and features of respondents were selected purposefully to achieve the objective reflexively.

Current Status of Corruption in Nepal

Table 2. *Status of Corruption*

Responses	**Frequency**	**Total**	**Percentage**
Decreasing	12	100.0	12%

Same as in the past years	29	100.0	29%
Increasing	59	100.0	59%

Source: *Survey, 2024*

Regarding the trend of corruption in Nepal, 59% of respondents perceive that corruption is increasing, 29% perceive it as remaining the same as in previous years, and 12% perceive it as decreasing. This table reflects that corruption is increasing significantly whether it is material or no-material.

Most Prevalent Types of Corruption in Nepal

Table 3. *Types of Corruption*

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Bribery	92	100	92%
Embezzlement	84	100	84%
Nepotism	66	100	66%
Fraud	37	100	37%
Extortion	21	100	21%

Source: Survey, 2042

Among the 100 respondents, 92 percent respondents perceive that Bribery is the most Prevalent type of corruption in Nepal followed by Embezzlement, Nepotism, Fraud and Extortion orderly. This data reflects that material and economy or monetary related corruption is most prevalent in Nepal.

Corruption Prone Areas in Nepal

Table 4. *Prone Areas of Corruption*

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Public Procurement	60	100.0	60%
Land Administration	15	100.0	15%

Judiciary & Law enforcement	25	100.0	25%

Source: Survey, 2024

In the survey question about areas or sectors prone to corruption in Nepal, 60% of respondents identified public procurement as the most susceptible to corruption, 25% pointed to the judiciary and law enforcement, and 15% identified land administration as the sector most prone to corruption. This data figure shows that public procurement sector particularly budget related and tender related areas are most corrupted. This is because there is a tendency of bribery to government official to reward certain percent of the total project amount and the tendency has been developed as a customary. In absence of this reward the contractor has to suffer delays in approvals and payment releases.

Broad Common Causes of Corruption

Regarding the causes of corruption 40% is attributed to politics, followed by social factors 36%, economic factors 16% and cultural factors 8%. According to data reflects in table number five; political sector and social sector comprised nearly same percentage of cause of corruption. This similarity is due to the interrelation between the social and political activities. Normally the people involved in social activities bear mass appeal and broad public network. Later such persons are framed by political parties so that they can get more votes. This chain has resulted in political corruption that emerged from the social relation and networks.

Table 5. *Common Cause of Corruption*

Responses	**Frequency**	**Total**	**Percentage**
Social	36	100.0	36%
Political	40	100.0	40%
Economical	16	100.0	16%
Cultural	8	100.0	8%

Source: Survey, 2024

**Most Prevalent Socio-economic Causing Factors of Corruption**

Table 6. *Socio-economic Causes of Corruption*

S.N	Response	No. of Respondents	Total	Percentage
1	Money is everything type of belief	94	100	94%
2	Erosion on moral/ethical values	91	100	91%
3	No social boycott of corrupt people	74	100	74%
4	Male have more corrupt behavior	23	100	23%
5	Ignorance of religious faith by civics	18	100	18%

Source: Survey, 2024

The most prevalent socio-cultural factors causing corruption are 'money is everything type of belief' system in the society which consists 94 percent responses followed by 'Erosion on moral/ethical values', and 'no social boycott of corrupt people'. The data depicts that not only economic but also social factor are responsible in corruption. Similarly, male civil servants having more corrupt behavior may be due to the lesser women share in civil services as well as the culture. This issue needs more exploration. Regarding the ignorance of religious teachings for civics may have caused the corruption because religious teaching is taught and learned by everyone during early age of socialization where basic ethical behavior about good and bad / right and wrong are in common. Secondly, moral education is guided by religious teachings which prioritize to conduct good deed. This requires religious teaching separately for civic like training/workshop to combat corruption. Below figure number one also outline the socio-economic causes of corruption in Nepal.

Figure 1: *Causes of Corruption in Nepal*
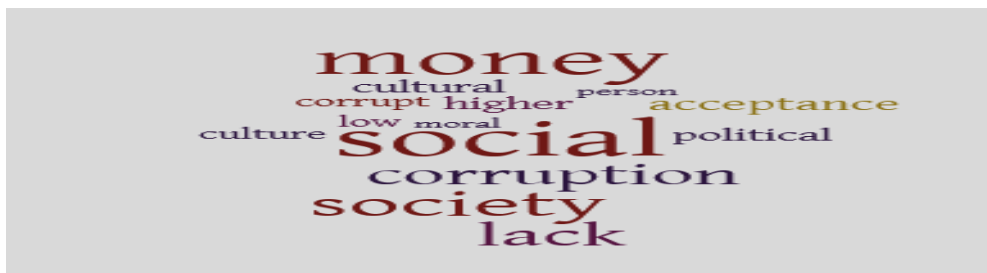
Source: Survey, 2024

An open-ended question "In your opinion, what are the socio-economic causes of corruption in Nepal?" was asked to write their opinion. The response of the participants was analyzed using the 'data visualization' technique to produce the word cloud as shown in the figure number one.

The word 'Social' had the frequency of 26, followed by 'Money 'and 'Society' and the word 'moral' repeated 7 times in the text. The senses of the majority of respondents in relation to the most visible and greater word represents the higher its frequency or importance in the text.

The majority of respondents expressed that the diminishing social and moral values contribute to a culture of corruption. They highlighted the growing influence of the "money is everything" narrative, which fosters materialistic temptations and weakens ethics and morals. Furthermore, respondents pointed to undue political interference in administration and the political protection of individuals involved in major corruption scandals as significant barriers to accountability. These factors collectively create an environment of corruption in Nepal.

Challenges to Control Corruption in Nepal

The respondents perceived that the top three challenges that are hindering the anti-corruption efforts in Nepal are political interference, lack of law enforcement, and institutional Corruption. Another prominent factor is Weak Legal institutional framework. According to the data structural challenge are most common to combat corruption in Nepal.

Table 7. *Main Challenges to Control Corruption*

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Political interference	87	100	87%
Lack of enforcement	76	100	76%
Institutional Corruption	65	100	65%
Weak legal framework	58	100	58%
Societal attitudes	16	100	16%

Source: Survey, 2024

Political Challenge to Control Corruption in Nepal

The table below shows the results of the survey on political challenge to combating corruption the most frequently cited challenge is the lack of political supports with 85 percent of respondents identifying it as a major obstacle. It followed closely by the accountability crisis among political representatives (77%) and weaknesses in the electoral system (76%). A significant minority (49%) also believe that public support for dishonest leaders is a challenge. Other challenges were mentioned by only 7 percent of respondents.

Table 8. *Political Challenges to Combat with Corruption*

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Political Support	85	100	85%
Accountability crisis among political representatives	77	100	77%
Electoral system	76	100	76%
Public support to dishonest leader	49	100	49%
Others	7	100	7%

Source: Survey, 2024

Economic Challenges to control Corruption in Nepal

Table 9. *Economic Challenges to Control Corruption*

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Low income of public servant	76	100	76%
Less transparent economic system	36	100	36%

Source: Survey, 2024

The table shows that low income of public servants and less transparent economic system are the major significant economic challenges to controlling corruption in

Nepal. According to the results 76 percent of respondents 'report low income of public servants and 36% respondents reported less transparent economic system as major economic challenges to control corruption in Nepal. These findings suggest that addressing these structural issues is crucial for curbing corruption in the country.

Socio-Cultural Challenges to Control Corruption in Nepal. The table presents socio-cultural challenges to control corruption in Nepal. The most significant challenge are "Public appreciation of corrupt person" with 76% of respondents", "Family Support/orientation," with 66 percent of respondents citing it. This is followed "culture of impunity" (65%) and "culture of social acceptance" (62%). These findings suggest that societal values, family support to corrupt member and cultural believe system play the crucial role in enabling and perpetuating corruption.

Table 10. *Socio-cultural Challenges to Control Corruption*

Responses	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Public appreciation of corrupt person	76	100	76%
Family Support/orientation	66	100	66%
Culture of impunity to the culprits	65	100	65%
Culture of social acceptance	62	100	62%
Weak monitoring system	57	100	57%
Poor legal setup	55	100	55%
Corruption is the easy way of getting rich	46	100	46%
Increasing materialist culture	30	100	30%
Culture of forgiveness	23	100	23%

Source: Survey, 2024

Strategies Needed to Be Adopted to Control Corruption in Nepal.

This research collected information through an open-ended questionnaire to understand opinion regarding the strategies to be adopted to control corruption in

Nepal. The open-ended question was: "In your opinion, what strategies Nepal should adopt to control corruption in the country?" The response was captured in text form and analyzed using word visualization technique.

The response of the entire participant was analyzed using the 'Data visualization' technique to produce the word cloud result which is shown in figure number two. In the result, the word 'Corruption' had the frequency of 25, followed by 'Public', 'education', 'awareness', 'strong' and the word 'legal' repeated 7 times in the text.

Figure 2: *Response Towards Strategies to Be Adopted to Control Corruption in Nepal.*

Source: Survey, 2024

The majority of respondents expressed a strong consensus on the need to control political corruption through various measures. As outlined in the earlier section political corruption and its linkages with socio-economic causes of corruption. They also emphasized that strengthening public policies aimed at curbing corruption is essential, along with the establishment of a robust institutional framework to ensure accountability. Additionally, respondents highlighted the importance of public education and awareness in fostering transparency, as an informed society can actively participate in holding institutions accountable. Furthermore, they stressed the necessity of implementing effective measures supported by strong legal and institutional mechanisms to combat corruption comprehensively.

5.   DISCUSSION

Based on the previous literatures the common types of corruption are grand corruption, systematic corruption and administrative corruption in the Nepal. According to the TI 2023 assessment, countries with peace, freedom, and robust democratic institutions likely to score well and Nepal have already made significant progress towards implementing federalism as per the 2015 Constitution. Nevertheless, there is still more work to be done to restructure and strengthen existing institutions and promote service-oriented public administration across all three levels of government.

Likewise, as theoretical literature suggest that political economy Theory and Social Capital Theory are most applicable to analyze the context cause and challenges to control corruption in Nepal. Similarly, literature on corruption and institutional theory highlights both the complexity and the challenges of combating corruption in Nepal. Despite significant strides in adopting formal anti-corruption measures, the effectiveness of these reforms has been undermined by weak institutional capacity, political interference, and entrenched cultural and political practices.

This study builds on existing literature by applying institutional theory to understand the interplay between formal and informal institutions in the Nepali context and by proposing ways to strengthen anti-corruption efforts through more aligned institutional frameworks. Interestingly, rational choice theory is not perfectly match with this finding because based on the obtained data and information corruption is not solely driven by individual behavior but also institutional and socially constructed.   By addressing these gaps, this research provides a nuanced understanding of corruption control in Nepal and offers actionable insights for reform.

As Thapa (2023) says, "…a substantial portion of the political corruption in these countries is rooted, and acknowledging that it is 'society driven' makes it difficult for the Anti-Corruption Commission to advocate for its impartiality successfully." Which is also supported by institutional theory and reflects that Nepal's efforts to control corruption reveals the challenge is not just one of individual behavior but of a deeply embedded institutional system where formal anti-corruption efforts are often undermined by social networks and political resistance. While formal institutions such as laws and anti-corruption agencies exist, their effectiveness is severely hampered by political influence, weak enforcement, and social acceptance of corruption. So, it can be argued that Systemic Corruption happening in Nepal

embedded with political and economic systems.

6. CONCLUSION

By and large, the participants in this research perceived the status of corruption as increasing. The main causes of prevalence of corruption are political, social, economic, and cultural in nature. Challenges to controlling corruption in public agencies/organizations in Nepal are political interference in the decision-making process, lack of enforcement of legal and regulatory provisions, and institutional corruption. And the obstacles to mitigating these challenges in the present context of Nepal are political back support for corrupt persons, lack of accountability of political appointees, and the present electoral system. The most challenging factors to control corruption in Nepal are to establish independent oversight bodies, enhance evidence collection mechanisms, and engage civil society in anti-corruption efforts.

From the socio-economic perspectives, the most challenging factors include low income of public servants vis-à-vis socio-cultural acceptance towards 'money is everything' phenomena, public appreciation to corrupt persons in the society, and culture of impunity to the corrupt people by the society.

To addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach, integrating political reform, stricter enforcement, and societal attitude shifts. Effective anti-corruption measures require independent oversight, stronger evidence collection, and active civil society engagement.

This study also prospects to establish an independent anti-corruption court as well.

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