

# The Comparative Study of Challenging Corruption by NGOs in I.R.I and the Philippines: The Lessons from Establishing Transparency for Iran and the Justice Watchdog Institute

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## Abstract

According to the components of good governance, which is the result of the World Bank and the United Nations, the fight against corruption is one of the most important components of good governance. Various factors such as the government, the private sector, and civil society are involved in the fight against corruption. However, the impartiality of civil societies<sup>1</sup> and non-governmental organizations have factors that can increase their effective and efficient participation in the fight against corruption. The present study uses a descriptive-analytical method to investigate the role of specialized civil society and non-governmental organizations in the fight against corruption in IRI and the Philippines. The findings of this study indicate that in the Philippines, specialized civil societies and non-governmental organizations such as the organization "Citizens Concerned for the Establishment of Good Cloud Governance", "Organization for the Procurement of Government Items and Procurement", "Accountability and Transparency Network" and The Association of Thousand Christian Members in the Government are the civil and non-governmental organizations active in the fight against corruption in this country in the Southeast Asian region. At present, in the fight against corruption in IRI, the decision making is done through governmental institutions in parallel, but from September 2015 a civil society has been activated as Watch Transparency and Justice. Although very good laws have been passed by the Islamic Consultative Assembly and these laws have recognized the role of civil and non-governmental organizations, but in terms of structure and behavior compared to Southeast Asia, there is a considerable gap, and in principle, specialized civil and non-governmental organizations do not play a significant role in the fight against corruption, but basically such institutions have not been established comprehensively and it is necessary to recognize the role of these institutions based on a comparative study. To be supported by the government and while recognizing these specialized institutions, these tools should also be used in the fight against administrative and economic corruption.

**Keywords:** Specialized Civil Society; Anti-corruption; Pathology of the causes of corruption.

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## INTRODUCTION

Corruption is an insidious plague that has a wide range of corrosive effects on societies. It undermines democracy and the rule of law, leads to violations of human rights, distorts markets, erodes the quality of life, and allows organized crime, terrorism, and other threats to human security to

flourish.<sup>1</sup> One of the most important obstacles to development is corruption. Corruption is a complex phenomenon and its roots lie deep in bureaucratic and political institutions, and its effect on development varies with the country's conditions.<sup>2</sup> Corruption threatens national and international security and increases poverty. The fight against corruption is inevitable for the I.R.I and, as follows the order of the supreme leader of I.R. of Iran, "The Staff of Challenge against Economic Corruption" established on Monday, April 30, 2001.<sup>3</sup> This staff is a combination of members of 3 branches of power: the executive; the judiciary, and the legislature. In the I.R.I, the concentration on fighting against corruption is divided into 3 branches of power and civil society doesn't have an effective role in fighting against this abnormality, but the role of civil society in the Philippines is remarkable and effective. This article seeks to explain how civil society can play an important role in combating corruption. In addition, we consider the role of civil societies in I.R.I and the Philippines and answer the question of how civil society can play a similar role in I.R.I. to fight against corruption.

## DEFINITION OF CORRUPTION AND RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Various definitions of corruption have been proposed within national and international organizations. The abuse of public office for private gain.<sup>2</sup> In another definition, corruption is defined as the exercise of official powers against the public interest.<sup>4</sup> Dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power, typically involving bribery.<sup>5</sup> In all definitions, the common subject is a break of laws and regulations, dishonest or illegal behavior, especially by powerful people (such as government officials or police officers).<sup>6</sup> Corruption is the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. It can be classified as grand, petty and political, depending on the amounts of money lost and the sector where it occurs.<sup>7</sup>

## THE COSTS OF CORRUPTION IN UNDEVELOPED, DEVELOPING AND DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

In general, corruption and underdevelopment are closely related. On the other hand, Corruption is a global phenomenon that exists in all countries, but according to the evidence, it harms poor countries more than others, suppresses economic growth, and deprives budgets needed for education, health,

and other public services. It deviates from its path. According to the World Bank, approximately one trillion US dollars are exchanged through bribes annually. Yuri Fedotov, executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime expressed that "Corruption is a global threat. It is an obstacle to economic development," He pointed out that corruption increases inequality and injustice and destroys the foundations of stability, especially in important areas. The UN General Assembly also recognizes corruption as an obstacle to development that diverts existing resources to eradicate poverty and sustainable development, and requires members who have not yet ratified the convention to do so.<sup>8</sup>

Corruption has costs for every country and there are no differences between undeveloped, developing, and developed countries. According to International Transparency, corruption impacts societies in a multitude of ways. This international NGO divided the cost of corruption into four main categories, such as political, economic, social, and environmental, as follows<sup>7</sup>:

- 1.2. On the political front, corruption is a major obstacle to democracy and the rule of law. In a democratic system, offices and institutions lose their legitimacy when they're misused for private advantage. This is harmful in established democracies, but even more so in newly emerging ones. It is extremely challenging to develop accountable political leadership in a corrupt climate.
- 2.2. Economically, corruption depletes national wealth. Corrupt politicians invest scarce public resources in projects that will line their pockets rather than benefit communities, and prioritize high-profile projects such as dams, power plants, pipelines, and refineries over less spectacular but more urgent infrastructure projects such as schools, hospitals, and roads. Corruption also hinders the development of fair market structures and distorts competition, which in turn deters investment. According to the assessment of the World Bank, the international cost of corruption is 1000,000,000\$ every year.<sup>9</sup>
- 3.2. Corruption corrodes the social fabric of society. It undermines people's trust in the political system, in its institutions, and its leadership. A distrustful or apathetic public can then become yet another hurdle to challenging corruption.
- 4.2. Environmental degradation is another consequence of corrupt systems. The lack

of, or non-enforcement of, environmental regulations and legislation means that precious natural resources are carelessly exploited, and entire ecological systems are ravaged. From mining to logging to carbon offsets, companies across the globe continue to pay bribes in return for unrestricted destruction.

## THE STUDY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ROLE IN COMBAT CORRUPTION IN I.R OF IRAN AND PHILIPPINE

### 1.3. Iran:

These days, the combat against corruption is propagated and some special non-government organizations have been established, but it seems that they don't have an effective role in fighting against corruption like non-governmental organizations. In practice, governmental organizations in the general sense play the real role. However, it seems to be the biggest hope that the government has licensed these institutions for transparency and fight against

corruption, which such a process can be effective in the medium and long term. They are involved in the fight against corruption, but at the same time, it revives the hope of fighting corruption in the hearts of non-governmental organizations. According to the opinion of some scientists and former ministers, the formal statistics show that the vast number of corruption cases shows that corruption is increasing in I.R.I. and combat against corruption is more an election motto<sup>10</sup> and civil societies and Non-Governmental Organizations don't have significant role in combat and the most concentration is on government institutes. International Transparency, which considered the occurrence of corruption in the world in 2020, classified the score of countries from zero (high corrupt) to one hundred (most Transparent). This organization in its report studied 177 countries that shows Corruption Perceptions Index in every part of world. The rank of Iran in corruption has increased from 146 in 2018 to 149 in 2022. According to the report of this international civil society, Control of Corruption in Iran (2010) is about 20%.<sup>11</sup>

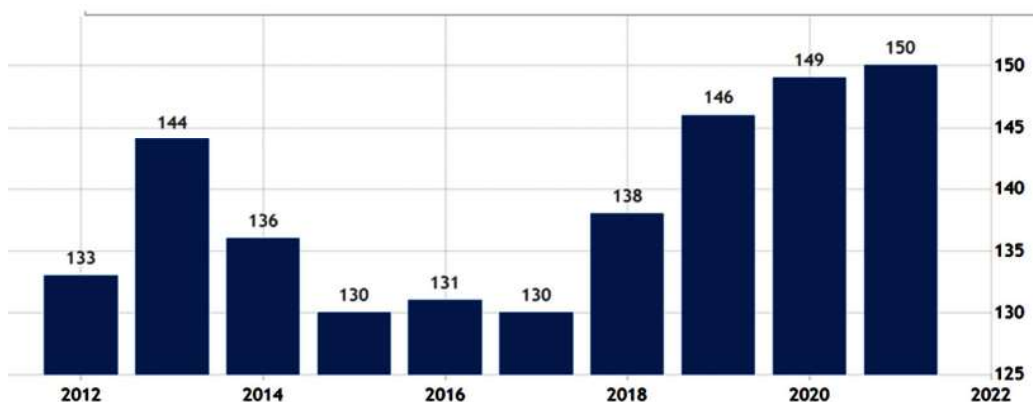


Table 1: Shows Iran's ranking in corruption from 2012 to 2022.

In the discussion about the Cause Analysis of corruption in Iran, we can tell that there is no special academic center to study about corruption. Unlike the mottos and hubbubs, there is no consensus against corruption on the condition that corruption is a social, economic, cultural, political, and even security problem in Iran. There is no formal course at education centers such as universities at the national level. There is no remarkable research into the causes and consequences of corruption and the fight against corruption is not scientific and the amount of research is not remarkable. The remarkable fact is that the study of the cause of corruption is limited by the security center of organizations, as if corruption is the red line of

research and that means that the preparation for the study of the subject does not exist yet. The lack of a special civil society as a supervisor in the government decision-making process is a weak and there is no sign of it in the fight against corruption.<sup>10</sup> The most important factor for the extension of corruption is the governmental economy and big government and until 2016 more than 70% of Iran's economy is governmental and this kind of economic model has not been effective and successful in any part of the world.<sup>12</sup> The government of Japan, with a 130 million population, has 339,785 employees, but I.R.I has more than 390000 in its public and government sectors.

In addition, as discussed, the size of the private

sector is about 30% and this process shows that the private sector doesn't have an effective role in the economy and it causes amplitude or bigness of government is the most important reason for financial and political corruption. Although the mentioned documentary analyzes the fight against corruption in Iran, since 2014, two non-governmental organizations have been established in the fight against corruption, which in some cases have been able to play a direct and indirect role in the fight against corruption. The following two civil societies are briefly examined:

### 1.3.1. *Transparency for Iran*

Transparency for Iran Think Tank was established in 2014 to improve efficiency, administrative integrity, responsibility, and accountability in governance. Accordingly, the mission of Transparency for Iran is to create a suitable platform for appropriate and desirable governance to increase trust and social capital. Transparency for Iran believes that the main basis and solution to the country's major problems depends on the realization of "transparency" as a whole, and related concepts such as public oversight, effective participation of the people in various areas of government, and prevention of corruption.

At the beginning, Transparency for Iran focused on the basic issues of transparency, scientific research, and existing challenges, and in order to adapt these concepts into the context of the country and its localization, several meetings were held at universities, research institutes, and scientific centers. With the maturity of transparency knowledge and the creation of a conceptual network of transparency in governance, efforts to make public discourse and public demand at various levels continued. This led various people with different social beliefs and positions in social institutions and government to show desire for transparency and related concepts, and led to a wide range of projects and joint work programs.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.3.1. *Transparency and Justice Watchdog*

Article 9 of the Transparency and Justice Watch Statute states that "the purpose of establishing this organization is to make transparent any misuse of powers and laws, for the gain of personal and group interests that are subject to corruption.

Also, according to paragraph b of Article 9, the Association of this civil institution, "using research methods, preparing documents for propaganda and promotion of preventive methods, proposing bills and laws required by the parliament,

preparing and presenting strategies and strategies for changing economic structures, information and public awareness and litigation, each in accordance with the opportunities and needs and within the framework of the relevant laws.

However, it is stated that "the consent of the licensing authority to carry out the activities mentioned in the objectives and procedures does not mean permission to operate in cases that require obtaining a license from certain organizations". Obviously, taking any action in order to implement some of the goals and methods of implementation that require the consent of a particular organization, is subject to obtaining permission from that authority." This shows that for any action other than those mentioned in Article 9, it must obtain permission from the relevant government, but the question is whether their own institution is accused of economic and administrative corruption. What is the duty? What is clear is that no license is issued. Transparency and Justice Watch Through its website, the organization receives public reports of any corruption, and also intervenes in any corruption involving at least one real or legal government official. Apart from Tehran, this organization also has offices in other provinces of the country. Among the positions of this organization are warnings about the effect of GPA on the national entrance exam, banning 134 students from veterinary medicine to medicine, eliminating board quotas pointed out the follow-up of the conscription system regarding the candidates for the national entrance examination. The organization has so far pursued dozens of popular demands, filed dozens of corruption cases, and sued some government officials. In 2017, this institution unveiled a plan to introduce 5 media and journalists active in the field of fighting corruption. Transparency and Justice Watch called on the Minister of Health to cancel the plan to transfer medical students abroad into the country due to gross discrimination. It revealed that members of the N.G.O Institute's Board of Inquiry had all resigned under duress.

### 2.7. *Philippines*

The Corruption Perceptions Index ranks countries and territories based on how corrupt their public sector is perceived to be. A country or territory's rank indicates its position relative to the other countries and territories in the index.

The Philippines and non-governmental organizations have an active presence in combating corruption. The non-governmental organization

that the main object of their establishment is combat against corruption have active voice in Philippines. The Philippine government, like every modern government, is divided into three powers: the executive; the judiciary, and the legislature. In addition to separation of powers, civil societies claimed that the fourth seat of power in the Philippines after the People Power Revolution in 1986 that toppled President Ferdinand Marcos after alleged cheating in the presidential election. Civil

society and non-governmental organizations once again illustrated its strength during the ouster of yet another President, Joseph Estrada, through EDSA II, in 2001. The most important purposes of special civil societies and non-governmental organizations against corruption in the Philippines are increasing knowledge of people about corruption, holding seminars, congress that help combat against corruption and increasing the knowledge of people about fighting against corruption.

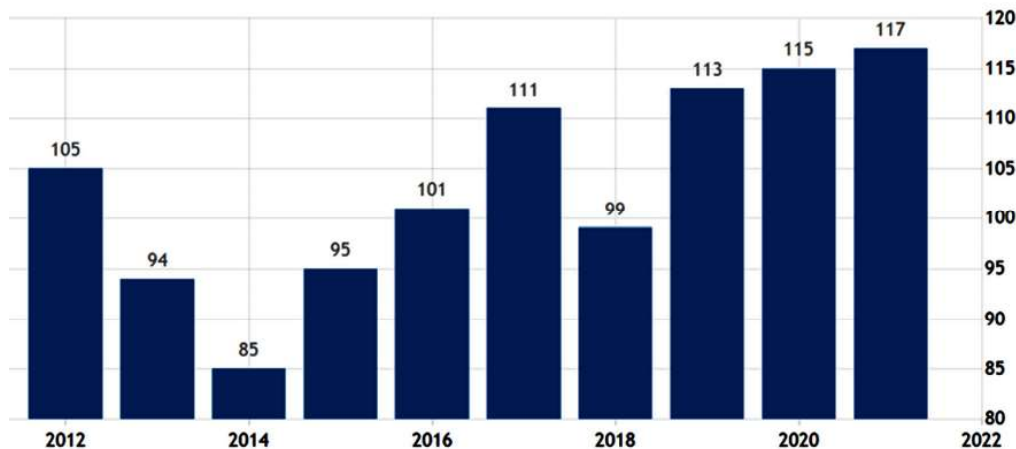


Table 2: Shows the Philippines' ranking in corruption from 2012 to 2022

These kinds of NGOs participate in and supervise government decision-making to fight against corruption. Also, the Philippines has the maximum press freedom in East Asia and the use of press disquisition helped challenge corruption. The existence of independent gregarious media in this country has helped challenge corruption. Independent media by propagation of information and analyzing corruption, challenging it and disclosing information increase awareness of people, combating against corruption. For instance, press disquisition about President, Joseph Estrada, through EDSA II, in 2001. Also the Philippines has the most press freedom in South East Asia. We consider the role of the Philippines people and civil society in challenging corruption as follows:

**1. 2.7. The Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG):**

The NGO of Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG), is a locally based organization that works in the rural, remote, mountainous province of Abra. It was established in 1987 as an outgrowth of a wider democratization movement in the Philippines. This civil society carries out on-the-spot checks on infrastructure projects to ensure that government money is used

for its intended purpose. Monitoring of government projects began following the rapid decay of several bridges and roads that seemed to go nowhere.

CCAGG specializes in engaging ordinary citizen volunteers in monitoring infrastructure projects in the province. With the support of PI, CCAGG will strengthen its capacity to undertake local-level budget monitoring of public works and contribute to increasing the technical capacity of other organizations to replicate its work, promote good governance, and fight the rampant corruption that currently exists. CCAGG will organize, mentor, and train community members and civil society groups in Regions I, II, and CAR to undertake citizen monitoring of public work.<sup>15</sup>

**2. 2.7. Procurement Watch Incorporate (PWI)**

PWI specializes as a non-governmental organization is very active in Monitoring Public Procurement in the Philippines. In 2001, a group of individuals determined to fight corruption in government procurement in the Philippines established Procurement Watch Inc. (PWI) as a non-governmental organization to advocate for a new procurement law and to monitor enforcement of the law after it was enacted. In 2003, PWI's advocacy efforts assisted passage by the national

legislature of a new procurement law perhaps the first time in the country's history that a civil society group successfully advocated for a law on a subject that required a high degree of technical expertise. Currently, PWI conducts a wide variety of capacity building activities with different groups and individuals, including anti-corruption officials, agencies involved in large procurements, civil society organizations, and private citizens.<sup>16</sup> PWI's most recent initiative has been to develop Differential Expenditure Efficiency Measurement (DEEM), a tool to measure corruption and inefficiency in public procurement. PWI has tested DEEM by collaborating with the government's internal audit agency, which agreed to provide PWI with access to procurement documents maintained by the agencies it was auditing. In addition, Procurement Watch Incorporate and the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government. Other non-governmental organizations, such as Transparency & Accountability Network, The Fellowship of Christians in Government are active in establishing transparency and challenging and combat corruption.

### 3. 2.7. *The Fellowship of Christians in Government, Inc. (FOCIG)*

The Fellowship of Christians in Government, Inc. (FOCIG) is a network of Christians in various government offices who are committed to sharing support and encouraging each other in living out God's values in government institutions; promote justice and righteousness in their workplaces; assist the public in their transactions with the government; and prevent and fight graft and corruption.<sup>17</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In the consideration of corruption as a social, political, economic and even security phenomenon, the combat against it should be done by every actor of society. In the fight against corruption, different actors such as the government, the private sector, and civil society and non-governmental organizations can ply their role, but among the mentioned actors, the role of civil society is effective and crucial. In the modern world, the scope of economic activity and fiscal interaction is so extensive and complex that supervision without civil society organizations is impossible. Toadies in the Philippines, different civil society and non-governmental organizations such as "The Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG), that carries out on-the-spot checks on

infrastructure projects to ensure that government money is used for its intended purpose, and other NGOs such as Procurement Watch Incorporate (PWI) and Transparency & Accountability Network and The Fellowship of Christians in Government are civil society Organizations that try to fight against corruption. In fact, in Iran, the special civil society are in the beginning of their mission and there are 2 special NGOs for fighting against corruption. The first one is Transparency and Justice Watchdog and the second one is Transparency for Iran Think Tank. In the fight against corruption, they play their role in the framework of governmental organization. In reality, compared to the past, they do their duty beside the government. And after establishing these NGOs, the only team responsible for combating corruption is not the government. It seems that "Iran's special civil society has a long way to start fighting against corruption", therefore the role of Civil Society Organizations should be revised. In fact, in Iran there is no special Civil Society Organizations against corruption and the gap is much greater than in the Philippines. Unlike the law that was ratified in the parliament of the I.R. of Iran and recognition of the role of civil society organization and recognition of the role of civil society in different laws, the special civil society doesn't have a considerable role in the battle against corruption. Finally, the hardest problem to address seems to be the culture of corruption and the pathology of this abnormality, education should be developed by civil society and government until people stand against corruption. It is also not easy to persuade people not to receive any gifts or dinners from candidates for public offices and not to sell their vote to corrupt politicians. It will take a long time to change people's way of thinking and way of life. But we do not have to have pessimism. In this regard, civil society has a crucial role to play in enhancing public awareness and in challenging the deep rooted culture of corruption.

## SUGGESTIONS

1. Increasing the supervision of civil societies in the fight against corruption in developing countries.
2. Developing the Disquisition of the press to combat corruption.
3. Establishing the culture of anti-corruption in society and increasing accountability.
4. Governments and their employees should be held responsible for their actions to promote

organizational accountability.

5. For development an appropriate legal framework should be created that provides stability and predictability, which are the essential elements in creating an economic environment in which business risks may be rationally assessed and corruption eliminated.
6. Transparency and information process should be established. The themes of transparency and information pervade good governance and reinforce accountability. Access to information for the various players in the market is essential to a competitive market economy and challenging corruption.

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