# APPROACHES FOR CURBING CORRUPTION IN EMERGING ECONOMIES

## Sihle Lloyd Ndlovu *, Emmanuel Mutambara **

\* *Corresponding author,* Graduate School of Business & Leadership, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Westville, South Africa
Contact details: University of KwaZulu-Natal, University Road, Westville, 3630, South Africa
\*\* Graduate School of Business & Leadership, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Westville, South Africa

## Abstract

International trends suggest that corruption is prevalent in every country (Enste & Heldman, 2017). For instance, Sohail, Arslan and Zaman (2014) contended that corruption is increasingly having negative implications for governments and organisations worldwide. Therefore, this study explores the approaches for curbing corruption in emerging economies. An exploratory research design was conducted. The qualitative research method was adopted to investigate the subject matter. Interviews were conducted among 12 participants in the selected municipalities located in KwaZulu-Natal. Data quality was determined through trustworthiness. The data was analysed using NVivo, version 12.0. Thematic analysis was conducted to observe, organise, describe, and report the patterns obtained from the data set. The overall findings identified key approaches to curbing corruption in the KwaZulu-Natal municipalities, including resource availability, anti-corruption agencies, community involvement and participation, legal frameworks, non-political interference, and accountability. The study provides adequate explanations of the approaches to curbing corruption in emerging economies. The study will help South African public organisations to detect different forms of corruption and take appropriate measures to mitigate them. The study will help accountability, transparency, and good governance in the South African public sector.

**Keywords:** Accountability, Anti-Corruption Agencies, Corruption, Legal Frameworks, Non-Political Interference

## 1. INTRODUCTION

International trends suggest that corruption is prevalent in every country (Enste & Heldman, 2017). For instance, Sohail, Arslan, and Zaman (2014) contended that corruption is increasingly having negative implications for governments and organisations worldwide. Moreover, scholarly researchers have indicated that corruption prevails in every country, weakening development and undermining the justice system (Aliyev, 2015; Khan & Quaddus, 2015; Osipian, 2012). Andvig (2006) believes no universal definition exists on the term "corruption", however, the most popular definition was propounded by Nye (2002), which explains corruption as the behaviour that deviates from

the acceptable behaviour within the public service. On the contrary, World Bank (2014) sees corruption as the abuse of public resources for personal gains. The World Bank (2014) estimated that approximately US$1 trillion was lost due to different forms of bribery and corruption. For instance, a study reveals that Pakistan lost approximately US$94 billion in corruption, and tax evasion (Transparency International, 2016). Similarly, a study conducted by Shabbir (2017) reveals that Indonesia lost approximately US$238.6 million in 2011 due to corruption.

The situation like in advanced countries also prevails in Africa. For example, the 2014 corruption index report[1] revealed that corruption in Africa was comparatively high compared to European countries. The most corrupt countries in Africa cited in the 2014 corruption index report include Angola, Papua New Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Togo, Republic of Central Africa, Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Ecuador, Cameroon, Liberia, and South Africa evasion (Transparency International, 2016). According to Elbahnasawy and Revier (2012), corruption has cost Africa approximately US$148 billion, which is equivalent to 25% of its gross domestic product (GDP). In Nigeria, for instance, it was reported that the country lost close to ₦1.067 trillion (₦ for Nigerian naira) — US$6.8 billion — due to widespread corruption and inefficiency (United States Department of State, 2012). In South Africa, Naidoo (2012) concurs that corruption remains the most significant challenge, even though the country was ranked the 71 least corrupt countries worldwide. Georgieva (2017) postulates that corruption in South Africa is rising based on corruption index reports released by Transparency International and other agencies. For example, the Afro barometer correction report released on 13 September 2017 indicates that South Africa was among the worst-performing countries when it comes to corruption since 2008. De Lange (2011) points out that between 2010–2011, the Auditor-General uncovered approximately R26,4 billion (R for South African rand) that relate to unauthorised, irregular, and fruitless expenditure in South African public service. Furthermore, evidence suggests that nearly 34% of government institutions continue to award themselves, close friends, and family members contracts (De Lange, 2011). The view expressed by the above scholars was reaffirmed by Mantzaris (2017), who postulates that corruption in the public sector is a daily reality despite the comprehensive anti-corruption strategies implemented by successive governments.

Different factors were attributed to the seemingly increase in corruption within the South African public sector, including abuse and mismanagement of funds, bribery, procurement fraud, and irregularities (Georgieva, 2017; Serfontein & de Waal, 2015; Manyaka & Nkuna, 2014). Munzhedzi (2016) also contends that the public procurement process within the South African public sector is an inseparable twin of corruption. This is because a significant part of government expenditure is spent on the purchase of goods and services, that contravened legal prescripts.

Corruption Watch reports that corruption activities have plagued South African municipalities since its inception in 2012 until the end of 2020 (Newham, 2020). Annually, the Corruption Watch receives approximately 33,000 whistle-blower reports, of which 16% are related to corrupt activities. For instance, in 2020, more than 857 corrupt activities were recorded. This revelation reaffirms the Auditor-General of South Africa's (AGSA) findings, which state that South Africa lost about R32 billion due to procurement-related corruption. Moreover, evidence suggests that Eskom has debt amounting to R400 billion due to maladministration, mismanagement, corruption, and state capture (Staff Writer, 2019). In a similar corruption scandal, South African Airways was investigated for corrupt activities regarding the award of contracts and tenders without due regard for processes and procedures (Van Zyl, 2018). The analysis of the corruption cases presented above suggests that corruption is very prevalent in South Africa. Given the revelations, it appears that government anti-corruption strategies have failed to address this canker. The review of the literature suggests that there is limited empirical research on the approaches to curbing corruption, especially in emerging countries like South Africa. Moreover, the study observes that there is no conclusive research on the appropriate theoretical framework that helps curb corruption. Hence, this study aimed to address the gap in research. The broad aim of this study was to explore the approaches and anti-corruption strategies that could help curb corruption in emerging economies. The specific objective of the study was to determine the best approaches to curbing corruption. Ethical leadership was the most appropriate theoretical lens that supports this study. This study is significant because the findings will serve as a useful tool for governments in curbing corruption, especially in emerging economies. The study adopted the qualitative research approach to investigate the phenomenon. The study expands on limited empirical research on the approaches to fighting corruption in the South African public sector.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature. Section 3 analyses the methodology that has been used to conduct empirical research. Section 4 presents the results of the study. Section 5 provides a discussion of the results. Section 6 draws the conclusion of the study.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Understanding corruption

There are divergent views on the conceptualisation of the term "corruption". Scholarly researchers (Bicchieri & Ganegonda, 2016; Dimant & Schulte, 2016) argue that corruption is a multifaceted social issue, and the desire to engage in corrupt behaviour is multifaceted. Mafunisa (2007, p. 261) concurs that corruption is defined in several ways. According to Heidenheimer (1970), corruption refers to behaviour that is different from the expected duties and responsibilities of a public role because of personal relationships. These behaviours include bribery, nepotism, and misappropriation (Thornhill, 2012, p. 140). According to Lewis (2011), the World Bank

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[1] https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2014

perceives corruption as the abuse of resources. Moreover, it appears that corruption is attributed to the ability of the individual to perform a mandate with the desire to receive certain benefits (Anik & Bauer, 2005). The definitions above are similar to the ones propounded by the World Bank (1997). This study observes that the definitions above are limited in scope. The commonality across these definitions is the notion of the misappropriation or abuse of public office for one's selfish interest or personal gain. This study disagrees with the notion that corruption prevails, especially within the public sector. The review of empirical works demonstrates that corruption is equally rife in the private sector. This assertion underscores a similar view expressed by scholars like Montiel, Husted, and Christmann (2012) and Park and Blenkinsopp (2011). Nevertheless, this study adopts the definition propounded by the World Bank.

## 2.2. Factors contributing to corruption in South African public sector

Since the transition, the new South African government has introduced the most innovative and sophisticated legal frameworks to curb corruption, particularly within the public sector (Mle & Maclean, 2011; Manyaka & Sebola, 2014). For instance, the Constitution, in particular, prescribes the fundamental principles that should guide public institutions in executing their duties (Manyaka & Sebola, 2014). According to Mathiba (2021), the South African anti-corruption legal framework is a progressive one in many ways. However, there are several challenges that affect the functioning of the anti-corruption measures. The chief challenges include non-compliance with legal frameworks and lack of enforcement (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2011).

Mle and Maclean (2011) discover that insufficient political will is another cause of corruption in Africa. Smith (2010) posits that in many nations, most people struggle for political power because of their private gain. Vyas-Doorgapersad (2011) postulates that widespread corruption allows politicians to act only in the best interest of the minority. Manyaka and Nkuna (2014) argue that most politicians have not shown a bold interest in fighting corruption. A classic example is a former president, Mr. Jacob Zuma, who benefited unduly from the taxpayers' money.

Scholars, such as de Waal (2012) and Thornhill (2012), identify political deployment as a cause of corruption in South Africa. Evidence suggests that the African National Congress (ANC) has come under serious criticism for its policies of appointment (Areff, 2012; de Waal, 2012; Thornhill, 2012). Social commentators argue that appointments into the public sector organisations are seen as vehicles through which people are rewarded for their association with the political party. According to Areff (2012), due to the political deployment, corruption and abuse of resources become fertile ground to breed often resulting in service delivery protests. Dassah (2018) further claims that the board of Eskom was improperly appointed and did not conform to King III's report on good corporate governance. This implies that the board failed to act in the best interests of the country and did nothing to prevent conflicts of interest.

De Waal (2012) and Thornhill (2012) point out that low wages, paid to, especially public service workers exacerbate bureaucratic corruption in South Africa. The scholars argued most public officials often engage in corrupt activities because of inadequate wages and salaries. The scholars (de Waal, 2012; Thornhill, 2012) alleged that this phenomenon prevails mostly within the traffic police department and custom unit.

## 2.3. South Africa corruption index 2009–2018

Bowen, Edwards, and Cattell (2012) explain that South Africa has suffered from unprecedented high-level corruption over the years. The South African Corruption Report contradicts previous reports and empirical research on the state of corruption in South Africa (Government of South Africa, 2018). Although the comparative analysis of the corruption index reports revealed that corruption is relatively low in South Africa as compared to the countries in Africa, the citizens perceived corruption to be on the rise (Georgieva, 2017). According to Georgieva (2017), the Afrobarometer report on corruption released on 13 September 2017 indicates that South Africa has been among the worst-performing countries when it comes to corruption since 2008. The report is contrary to countries like Botswana, Malawi, and Mozambique, where citizens expressed that their governments are making efforts to curb corruption. Figure 1 shows the scores of South Africa in terms of corruption from 2009 to 2018.

**Figure 1.** South Africa Corruption Report Index from 2009 to 2018
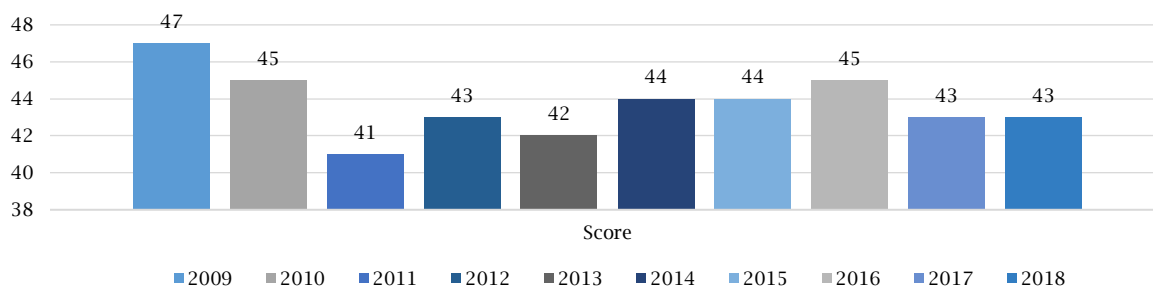


*Source: Transparency International (n.d.).*

According to Transparency International (n.d.), South Africa scored an average of 46.62 points from 1996 until 2018, reaching an all-time high of 56.80 points in 1996. In 2009, the country scored 47 points out of 100. However, in the year 2010, the country scored 45 points. In the year 2011, South Africa scored 41 points out of 100. The year 2012 saw an increase where the country scored 43 points out of 100. Furthermore, the country scored 42 points out of 100 on the 2014 Corruption Index Report released by Transparency International. The years 2014 and 2015 saw a further increase in corruption, where the country scored 44 points out of 100, respectively. The year 2016 witnessed a rise in corruption, where it scored 45 points out of 100. In 2017 and 2018, the country scored 43 points out of 100. The 2018 Corruption Index Report paints a largely grooming picture for Africa, where only 8 of 49 countries scored more than 43 out of 100 on the index.

## 2.4. Approaches to fighting corruption in South Africa

According to Meagher and Voland (2006), the South African government has implemented an approach called the "multi-agency model" from the United States of America and Western Europe. The authors argued that the model ensures the implementation of mechanisms to deal with gaps, weaknesses, and new opportunities relating to corruption. Boone (2002, p. 43) states that "South Africa has not less than twelve (12) anti-corruption agencies". However, Majila (2012) suggests that anti-corruption institutions are ineffective in fighting corruption due to insufficient resources, political interference, inadequate laws, insufficient accountability as well as the non-involvement of the community. However, Berning and Montesh (2012, p. 7) suggest that the government should ensure that anti-corruption agencies are sufficiently independent to prevent political interference.

It is suggested that to effectively combat corruption, a strong political will is required at all levels (Van Der Merwe, 2006). According to Van Der Merwe (2006), government officials must show their commitment to the fight against corruption. Ankamah and Manzoor Khoda (2018) suggest that although the political will is insufficient, the government and its officials need to fight corruption. Kukutschka (2015) agrees with the above scholars that the absence of political will accounts for the increasing rate of corruption in most countries.

Ruhiiga (2009) suggests a need for scientific research to determine the causes, nature, and dynamics of corruption. Ruhiiga (2009) indicates that the government and stakeholders must invest in corruption research to fight corruption. Sarmini, Swanda, and Nadiroh (2018) argue that investment in research and anti-corruption education is essential for curbing corruption.

To curb corruption, long-time anti-corruption strategies must improve ethics, accountability, and integrity. Moreover, Hope (2017) proposes that to help curb corruption in developing countries, developing and implementing a long-time anti-corruption strategy is needed. Zucman (2015) states that corruption requires an effective anti-corruption strategy. Spector (2016) concurs that the effective

implementation of anti-corruption strategies will help to promote a culture of trust, honesty, and accountability.

It has been found that to combat corruption in the public sector, there is a need for the government to allocate resources to anti-corruption agencies. For instance, in their study, Sharma and Paramati (2021) propose that financial resource plays a vital role in combating the growth of corruption across the full sample, low and lower-middle-income countries and upper-middle and high-income countries. Similarly, Awopeju, Olowu, and Jegede (2018) suggest that the effectiveness of anti-corruption agencies depends on adequate funding. Moreover, it has been suggested that technological resource helps in curbing corruption in this modern era. According to Adam and Fazekas (2021), information technology can support anti-corruption by impacting public scrutiny in numerous ways: enabling reporting on corruption, promoting transparency and accountability, facilitating citizen participation and government-citizen interactions. Ajide (2020) admits that financial inclusion improves the control of corruption. Sharma and Paramati (2021) confirm that financial development is a critical tool for combating corruption.

The need for enhanced community involvement and participation is clearly articulated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and developmental local government legislation. Community members are now expected to play a more meaningful role in terms of their involvement in civic matters (Maphazi, Raga, Taylor, & Mayekiso, 2013). Similarly, Masuku and Molope (2020) confirm that community involvement or participation has constitutional backing to partake in local governance and the local municipal council has the constitutional mandate to facilitate community participation. It is argued that community participation in governance issues offers a more prominent control of the underprivileged over their circumstance and guarantees their full inclusion in determining their formative needs (Enaifoghe & Adetiba, 2019). It has been found that anti-corruption initiatives through spontaneous individual and collective involvement at the local level have an impact on creating accountability and transparency (Sakib, 2022).

Van Der Merwe (2006) advocates that effective corruption reporting mechanisms are essential aspects of anti-corruption systems to the extent that their non-existence may breed corruption. Van Der Merwe (2006) suggests that all the stakeholders must adhere to anti-corruption laws to help address corruption in society. Hope (2017) claims that to minimise corruption, public officials must demonstrate the willingness to report any wrongdoing of their colleagues irrespective of their position. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2016), there is a need for attitudinal change to combat corruption effectively.

The principal-agent theory holds that corruption occurs when civil servants lack accountability. Rose-Ackerman (2013) believes that accountability helps to reduce the possibility of corruption by reducing information asymmetry between citizens and public authorities. It is suggested that public sector officials need to act responsibly if they intend to fight corruption (Brusca, Manes Rossi, & Aversano,

2018). One study suggests accountability provides an efficient and effective use of state resources (Heald, 2012). Likewise, Schatz (2013) recommends that social accountability mechanisms be inclusive and broad to help fight corruption effectively. Other findings also demonstrate that accountability reduces corruption, ensures compliance with standards and procedures, and improves performance and organisational learning (Mauro, Medas, & Fournier, 2019).

Transparency can be understood as the extent to which citizens are informed about public policy decisions made. According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2019), the principle of transparency demands that citizens be informed of their rights and entitlements. Evidence suggests that transparency deters unethical behaviour, thereby reducing the likelihood of corruption (Coicaud, 2016). Likewise, Mistry (2012) argues that politicians and governments can eliminate corruption by promoting information-seeking behaviour among citizens.

## 2.5. Theoretical framework

Ethical leadership is the most appropriate theoretical framework that underpins this study. To curb unethical behaviour in the workplace, scholars and practitioners have prioritised the role of effective leadership (Wirba & Al-Zoubi, 2015). Kroukamp (2011) believes that leadership should promote public sector ethics. Africa is in dying need of ethical leaders, especially in the public sector, because of the rising corruption and bad governance. It is believed that ethical leadership could help combat corruption in public sector organisations in Africa. Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005) observe that for leaders to be perceived as ethical leaders, they should demonstrate qualities such as attractiveness, credibility, and legitimacy. These ethical leadership dimensions can be achieved through openness, honesty, and altruism.

Toor and Ofori (2009) claim that leaders are required to exhibit the utmost ethical conduct and moral standards in their daily behaviour, actions, and decisions to be role models for others. Dickson, Smith, Grojean, and Ehrhart (2001) contend that ethical leadership significantly impacted employees' ethical behaviour. Yukl (2012) expresses a similar view that followers' ethical behaviour can be altered by ethical leaders. One study (van Aswegen & Engelbrecht, 2009) demonstrates that ethical leadership has the capability to strategically position, and sustain an organisation successfully. In their study, van den Akker, Heres, Lasthuizen, and Six (2009) found that ethical leaders are considered moral persons and moral managers. Mihelic, Lipicnik, and Tekavcic (2010) believe that ethical leadership concerns avoiding unethical leadership. Marsh (2013) suggests that ethical leadership could be learned from others through self-reflexivity, mindfulness, self-reflection, observation, and dialogue. Scholars, such as Hassan, Wright, and Yukl (2014) and Schaubroeck et al. (2012) believe that ethical leadership positively influenced employee behaviour, thereby minimising absenteeism, and improving organisational commitment. Additionally, Thaler and Helmig (2016) argue that ethical leadership significantly impacted employees' perceptions and attitudes toward an organisation.

Mayer, Kuenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, and Salvador (2009) and De Hoogh and Den Hartog (2008) have suggested that ethical leadership positively impacted followers' prosocial behaviours and negatively impacted counterproductive behaviours, including deviance.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Research approach

The study was firmly rooted in the inductive research approach, which applies to qualitative research. Qualitative scholars (e.g., Worster, 2013) suggest that the inductive researchers "work from the 'bottom-up, by relying on participants' opinions to build broader themes and generate a theory interconnecting the themes" (p. 448). Inductive researchers often start with specific observations and the generalisation of the conclusions (Zalaghi & Khazaei, 2016). Given this approach, the researchers first chose a few observations and then generalised the conclusions to cover the target population.

### 3.2. Research design

Given the nature of the study, an exploratory research design was conducted, which aims to find new insights about a phenomenon (Rahi, 2017). The primary goal of exploratory research is to determine the feasibility of the research project (Hallingberg et al., 2018). Apart from the exploratory research design, descriptive research could also be appropriate for this study.

### 3.3. Research strategy

The study took the form of qualitative research. Creswell (2014) points out that qualitative research assists researchers in developing a level of detail from high involvement in the actual experiences. Qualitative research builds its premises on the inductive approach instead of the deductive approach. In addition to the qualitative method, the quantitative research method could also be appropriate for this study.

### 3.4. Research setting

This study was conducted in some selected municipalities within the KwaZulu-Natal province. There were various reasons for the choice of these municipalities. One important reason was that these municipalities, over the years, were faced with an allegation of corruption scandals. This enabled the researchers to explore the phenomenon in detail. Also, the choice of these municipalities was influenced by access to information and convenience.

### 3.5. Participants, sampling procedure and data collection instrument

The target population was 4000, including junior employees, municipal managers, chief financial officers, and executive managers in the participating organisation. The population of the study is only

30 participants that were selected using purposive sampling. The following criteria were adopted to select the research participants. Firstly, to participate in the study, the participant must be an employee in one of the municipalities. Secondly, a potential participant must fall within the sample frame. Thirdly, to qualify for the study, a participant must be an employee for more than two years in the municipality. The participants were then contacted on the telephone and via email. Finally, the participants who consented to be part of the study were recruited. Arrangements were then made with the participants concerning the date and time they will be available for participation in the study. The data was collected through interviews, where the researcher probed the participants for specific answers based on a particular subject matter. The interviews were audio-taped with the permission of the participants.

### 3.6. Data quality control

Data quality was determined through trustworthiness. There are four criteria for measuring trustworthiness in qualitative research.

*Credibility:* Credibility means internal validity in a quantitative study. According to Anney (2014), credibility measures how the research findings from the study can be confirmed by other scholars. The credibility was determined through audit trial, triangulation, peer briefing, prolonged engagement in the field, and reflexive journals.

*Dependability:* Bitsch (2005) refers to dependability as the stability or consistency of the results over time. It also involves the process whereby the research participants assess the findings, interpretations, and recommendations of the study to ensure that they are in line with the information collected from them. The dependability was determined through audit trial, stepwise replication, and code-recode strategy.

*Transferability:* Transferability measures how the study's research findings can be applied in another context with different participants (Bitsch, 2005). Transferability was determined by engaging in the thick description and the use of purposive sampling to select participants with adequate knowledge of the subject matter.

*Conformability:* Baxter and Eyles (1997) state that conformability measures how the research findings from the study can be corroborated by different researchers. Conformability was established through audit trail and triangulation.

### 3.7. Ethical considerations

The approval (HSSRC/00000986/2020) for this study was obtained from the Humanities Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The anonymity of the participants was ensured by replacing their personal information with pennames in the dissertation and future publications. Also, there was no risk involved in this research. In addition, a consent form was attached to the research instruments. The consent form provided detailed information about the method of investigation, benefits associated with the study, and how risks will be minimised Besides, the participants were assured that their participation in the study was voluntary. No participant was forced or influenced to be part of the study. Furthermore, the participants were assured of the confidentiality of the data.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The data was analysed using NVivo, version 12.0. Qualitative researchers use NVivo to organise, index, code, and query journals for specific topics (Robins & Eisen, 2017). Qualitative data analysis can be done in two ways, namely: content and thematic analysis. For this study, thematic analysis was utilised. This analysis method allowed the researcher to observe, organise, describe, and report the patterns obtained from the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Moreover, the mind map was used to display the main and sub-themes that emerged from the study. According to Kotob, Styger, and Richardson (2016), a mind map is used to analyse large amounts of qualitative data. The findings are shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Approaches to curbing corruption



### 4.1. Theme 1: Provision of resources

The participants were probed on how resource availability impacted the fight against corruption in the municipalities. The findings appeared to show varied perceptions among the participants concerning the provision of resources. While the majority (N = 7) of the participants indicated that the provision of resources will help curb corruption, however, a few (N = 4) of them argued that corruption cannot be reduced through the provision of resources. Some of the views expressed by the participants are stated as follows.

Participant 1 (Municipality A) said: "*Yes. By hiring private agencies that are independent*".

Participant 2 (Municipality A) expressed, "*Physically, if you have motivated leaders in the municipalities you are fighting corruption.*

*They will also be able to develop whistleblowing mechanisms and establish courts that will adjudicate corruption cases. With these individuals, we can be able to curb corruption".*

### 4.2. Theme 2: Legal frameworks

The majority of the participants (N = 8) argued that South Africa has weak legal frameworks which made it difficult for law enforcement agencies to combat corruption. The participants argued that the anti-corruption laws rather favour the corrupt official. Some of the views collected from the participants in support of the findings are presented as follows.

Participant 2 (Municipality A) said, *"No. There is no effective rule of laws in fighting corruption within municipalities. Hence, we have corruption cases that are being investigated without outcomes. Look at what is currently happening in the Zondo commission and I am not going to explain further".*

Participant 5 (Municipality B) said, *"No. If you say law it only favours the wrong people. You can put laws they are not going to work because those people can pay their ways out. Is all about money".*

### 4.3. Theme 3: Non-political interference

The findings indicated the fight against corruption can only be won if the politicians refrain from interfering in the works of the municipalities. Most of the participants (N = 10) argued that if there are no politicians involved it will be very easy for people to address corruption. The participants have said the following.

Participant 2 (Municipality C) said, *"Yes. I think is the principles of independence and separation of powers. There is also the need to strengthen the municipality structure Act and System Act. Those two Acts must be clear in terms of the fight against corruption. Non-political interference helps build the development of the locality without wasting resources".*

Participant 3 (Municipality A) stated, *"Yes. I think political inference is the one that causes corruption To begin with. So, when we stop that I think we will win it".*

### 4.4. Theme 4: Anti-corruption agencies

Most participants (N = 7) were of the view that anti-corruption agencies can be strengthened by formulating strong anti-corruption policies within the municipalities. Moreover, they argued that the anti-corruption agencies operate transparently. Additionally, some of the participants suggested that hiring private agencies that are independent would help to fight corruption in the municipalities. Some of the views collected from the participants which reaffirm the results are presented as follows.

Participant 1 (Municipality A) said, *"Yes. By hiring private agencies that are independent".*

Participant 2 (Municipality A) also indicated: *"Yes. I think it can be created by formulating strong anti-corruption polices within the municipalities. And also operating transparently. Also to detect mechanisms such as auditing, reporting and as well as accountability".*

### 4.5. Theme 5: Community involvement

The findings revealed that community involvement played a significant role in fighting corruption. From the interviews, most of the respondents (N = 9) opined that the involvement of the community helped to minimise the prevalence of corruption in the municipalities. The participants said that involving the community in the corruption fight will always help them to take action against municipalities. Moreover, they argued that harnessing the capacity of the community to fight corruption is essential. The participants said the following in support of the findings.

Participant 2 (Municipality B) indicated: *"Harnessing the capacity of the community to fight corruption is essential. I think it will lead to social accountability which will empower citizens with information. This will address corruption from bottom-up. Citizens are critical agent of change because they are the fight one to complaint and strike if there are potential corrupt activities".*

Participant 8 (Municipality B) said, *"Community involvement can affect corruption positively if it is non-political. Because most people like money. You can give people money even if it is small they can do something. So, it is non-political it is possible that the community can come together to fight corruption. It helps to make sure that the community is updated on everything that is happening in their environment".*

### 4.6. Theme 6: Accountability

The majority of the participants (N = 8) expressed that accountability helps people to be disciplined, hence it can be used as a tool to fight corruption. Additionally, the participants argued that accountability helps people to know that if they are involved in corruption they will get fired. The quotes obtained from the interviews in support of this finding are stated as follows.

Participant 2 (Municipality A) said: *"There is a principle of accountability in most South African public sector organisations. However, the municipality has a long way to go in fighting corruption and holding people accountable".*

Participant 7 (Municipality C) expressed *"If individuals are to be held accountable it will help to reduce corruption in the municipalities. People must take responsibility for their actions and inactions".*

## 5. DISCUSSION

The study investigated the approaches to curbing corruption. The findings showed different approaches were adopted by the municipalities in the fight against corruption, including resource availability, anti-corruption agencies, community involvement and participation, legal frameworks, non-political interference, and accountability. The findings showed that while the majority of the participants indicated that the provision of resources will help curb corruption, however, a few of them argued that corruption cannot be reduced through the provision of resources. Majila (2012), in his empirical research, discovers that anti-corruption agencies are ineffective in fighting corruption due to insufficient resources. Ajide (2020) admits that financial inclusion improves the control of corruption. Sharma and

Paramati (2020) confirm that financial development is a critical tool for combating corruption.

The study recommended that anti-corruption agencies can be strengthened by formulating strong anti-corruption policies within the municipalities. The findings are consistent with the study conducted by Meagher and Voland (2006), which states that the South African government has implemented an approach called the "multi-agency model" from the United States of America and Western Europe to help strengthen the anti-corruption agencies. Berning and Montesh (2012, p. 7) suggest that the government should ensure that anti-corruption agencies operate independently without political interference.

The study found that the participation of the community in the fight against corruption helped to minimise the prevalence of corruption in the municipalities. According to Devarajan, Swaroop, and Heng-fu (2013), civil society participation and involvement help to reduce corruption, inefficiency, and waste, particularly in government institutions. In South Africa, the Constitution forms the foundation for community participation in governance. The Constitution empowers civil society to hold the government accountable for its commitments and promises (Bowen, Edwards, Lingard, & Cattell, 2014).

The results suggested that South Africa has weak legal frameworks that support the fight against corruption. Ever since South Africa gained its independence in 1994, the democratically elected presidents have initiated several interventions or mechanisms to combat corruption, particularly in the public sector. The National Planning Committee of South Africa (2011, p. 446) confirms that the anti-corruption legal framework is weak to adequately protect the whistle-blowers and poor supply chain prescripts. Godi (as cited in Merten, 2017) concurs that the public sector lacks the capacity to enforce compliance with the anti-corruption regulations, and the legislative mandates of some law enforcement and other agencies overlap.

Besides, the findings suggested the fight against corruption can only be won if the politicians refrain from interfering in the works of the municipalities. The findings are supported by a study conducted by Van Der Merwe (2006), which states that to combat corruption, there is a need for strong political will.

The findings identified accountability as a unique approach to curbing corruption. Rose-Ackerman (2013) believes that accountability helps to reduce the possibility of corruption by reducing the information asymmetry between citizens and elected politicians. It is suggested that public sector officials should be held responsible for their actions during the tenure of their office (Brusca et al., 2018).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concluded that the approaches to fighting corruption in KwaZulu-Natal municipalities included resource availability, anti-corruption agencies, community involvement and participation, legal frameworks, non-political interference, and accountability. The study concludes that the provision of resources will help curb corruption in South African municipalities. It can be argued that anti-corruption agencies are able to fight corruption if they are well-resourced. Moreover, the study found that to combat corruption, anti-corruption agencies can be strengthened by formulating strong anti-corruption policies within the municipalities. It has also been suggested that the government should ensure that anti-corruption agencies operate independently without political interference. Also, it is recommended that qualified and experienced people should be appointed to the anti-corruption agencies. People with the experience, skills, knowledge, and track records in combating corruption should be assigned to head the anti-corruption agencies.

Besides, the study suggested that the participation or involvement of the community in the fight against corruption helped to minimise the prevalence of corruption in South African municipalities. Generally, it has been argued that civil society participation and involvement help to reduce corruption, inefficiency, and waste, particularly in government institutions. Furthermore, the study revealed that South Africa has weak legal frameworks that support the fight against corruption. The findings are consistent with the perceptions that the South African anti-corruption legal framework is weak to adequately protect the whistle-blowers and poor supply chain prescripts. The findings further suggested that the fight against corruption can only be won if the politicians refrain from interfering in the works of the municipalities. The government needs to demonstrate political will by holding its officials responsible and accountable for their actions.

Lastly, the study identified accountability as a unique approach to curbing corruption. One principle of accountability states that public sector officials must be responsive to the members of the public they interact with but accountable to their superiors. Accountability has two elements: answerability (holding people responsible for their actions) and enforceability (punishing people for corruption or poor performance). Accountability allows for the punishment of appointees who are involved in corruption-related activities. Therefore, to minimise corruption, much attention should be given to ways of making the sector to be more accountable. The parliamentary system and anti-corruption agencies should allow for more robust and more immediate monitoring of the executive by the legislature, which should increase accountability.

This paper is useful for future research because it makes a unique contribution to the practices and theory for the approaches to curbing corruption in South African public sector organisations. This implies that the research findings could only be applied to the public sector. The research findings have some managerial and practical implications, which can help South African organisations to detect different forms of corruption and take appropriate measures to mitigate them. However, the scope of the study was limited to the approaches to fighting corruption in the South African public sector.

The study only adopted the qualitative research method. This implies that the research findings cannot be generalised. Hence, future research should combine qualitative and quantitative methods

(mixed methods). Moreover, the study involved only public officials and workers in the public sector. This implies that the findings can only be applied in public sector organisations. Therefore, future research should combine both the public and private sector organisations.

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