



# The Place for Public Education and Awareness in Times of Crisis: The story of Kenya

[Purity Klithiru Gitonga](#)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Strathmore University, Kenya

## Abstract

*Transparency International is noted to have stated “Countries will not succeed in their recovery efforts (corona related) if they don’t also tackle corruption.” It is acknowledged the world over that corruption often thrives in times of crisis, as the UN Secretary-General António Guterres said in a statement: “Corruption is criminal, immoral and the ultimate betrayal of public trust. It is even more damaging in times of crisis – as the world is experiencing now with the COVID-19 pandemic” (Guterres, n.d.). Unfortunately, Kenya is one of the African countries that witnessed an unprecedented upsurge of corruption during the COVID-19 pandemic. The response to the virus created new opportunities to exploit. The government’s attempt to curtail the spread of the pandemic and save lives meant overlooking laid down principles, rules, and regulations of procurement. Sadly, the tenders and funds given out during the COVID-19 crisis created overnight millionaires diverting funds away from people in their hour of greatest need. Corona Billionaires headlines trended on all mainstream and social media. The period witnessed two problems co-joined on the hip—COVID-19 and corruption. This called for sustained public education and awareness. This paper addresses the twin challenge of corruption and COVID-19 in Kenya and discusses the place of public education and awareness in the fight against corruption particularly in times of crisis. The proverbial saying “an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure” still rings true to this day. A total of 190 respondents randomly sampled were reached through a questionnaire using an online survey platform. The findings of the study have an implication for management practices and anti-corruption strategies. The paper is a call to anti-corruption agencies to re-think the place of Education and Public Awareness in efforts to combat corruption.*

## Keywords

*Corruption; Crisis; COVID-19; Education; Public Awareness; Governance*

## Introduction

Corruption is one of the main challenges that Kenya grapples with. Respondents to EACC National Ethics and Corruption Survey 2017 (EACC, 2018) indicated that corruption and unethical conduct are widespread (over 71%) and that corruption (43.6%) ranked as the leading problem facing the country. At the beginning of 2020, the world was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has had profound impacts on individuals, organisations, and societies. Unfortunately, Kenya was one of the African countries that witnessed an unprecedented upsurge of corruption during the COVID-19 pandemic, given that a crisis can create the perfect opportunity for corruption to thrive. The response to the virus created new opportunities to exploit. The government’s attempt to curtail the spread of the pandemic and save lives meant overlooking laid down principles, rules, and regulations of procurement. Sadly, the tenders and funds given out during the COVID-19 crisis created overnight millionaires diverting funds away from people in their hour of greatest need. Corona Billionaires headlines trended on all mainstream and social media. Reports of corruption cartels, imposters conning business, and unscrupulous individuals were the order of the day. The period witnessed two problems co-joined at the hip—COVID-19 and corruption. This called for heightened public education and awareness and other anti-corruption approaches to arrest the rising discontent among the citizenry.

This chapter, therefore, presents the meaning of the terms crisis, corruption, education, and public awareness. The paper then delves into factors that influence corrupt behaviour by highlighting the theoretical framework and Kenya's legal framework that support anti-corruption efforts. The paper presents the story of Kenya during the COVID-19 period. The chapter underscores the place for Public Education and Awareness in Times of Crisis.

## Meaning of Terms

### **Crisis**

A crisis is defined in Webster's Dictionary as: "a crucial or decisive point or situation; a turning point" (Merriam-Webster (2023)). The Chinese say the word crisis is a combination of danger and opportunity. They argue that in times of crisis we have to be aware of two things: Danger and Opportunity. Crises come into our lives, no matter how we may try to avoid them. They are troubling, unwanted experiences or events that take us way out of our comfort zone. The crisis may be of a financial, relationship, health, or spiritual nature. Every crisis, while deeply unsettling, also contains the seeds of opportunity. In every crisis, there is opportunity and lessons to learn—If we have the courage to learn the lessons. Times of crisis bring out the best and worst in us. We typically find ourselves wanting desperately to get back inside the comfort of the known. But the crisis precludes that option. There is no going back. But that is where the opportunity lies. So we might look at the crisis as a blessing in disguise, albeit an unwanted one. Albert Einstein (n.d.) is quoted to have stated that in the midst of every crisis, lies great opportunity.

The COVID-19 Pandemic provided three key opportunities: opportunity for innovation, ingenuity and transformation in the way of doing things. The crisis provided an opportunity to reform a flawed health care system to not only prepare for future epidemics but to better meet all Kenyans' health care needs. The crisis forced us to rethink how education works. In the wake of COVID-19, education systems have an opportunity to reimagine learning and equip students with the cognitive, creative, social, emotional, and physical skills required to navigate the future. It deepened digital education.

Unfortunately, it created the perfect opportunity for increased levels of corruption through the manipulation of relaxed procurement regulations and oversight. Crisis could create opportunities for graft, including fraud and bribery stemming from critical emergency cash flows and medical supply shortages. Kenya was one of the African countries that witnessed an upsurge of corruption during the COVID-19 Crisis. The COVID-19 Crisis revealed the weaknesses in the government procurement, health, and anti-corruption system and strategies. Thus, the COVID-19 Crisis was a wake-up call that highlighted the need to recalibrate anti-corruption and health policies and also an opportunity for better governance, workforce transformation or reform, and new knowledge. It was an opportunity to spur innovation not only to rebuild the health sector systems and facilities but also build trust in service delivery.

### **Corruption**

One of the principles of any effective education and public awareness programme, is knowing and creating understanding of the problem ailing society. Thus, this chapter opens by giving a brief description of the meaning of the term corruption and the theories that explain factors that lead to corrupt conduct. Corruption is said to be a term of many meanings. The World Bank defines corruption as abuse of office for personal gain (World Bank, 1997). It also refers to any conduct or behaviour where a person entrusted with public or private responsibility or authority violates their duties resulting in personal gain or advantage and public loss or disadvantage. It also refers to the systematic use of public office for private benefit that results in a reduction in quality or availability of public goods and services. Arthur Lyon Dahl (2016) observes that the corruption is a social ill that eats into the vitals of global society today and is more than just the material corruption of bribery for personal gain. It is any undue preference given to personal or private gain at the expense of the public or collective interest, including the betrayal of a public trust or office in government, the manipulation of a corporate responsibility for self-enrichment, the distortion of truth, the misuse of a religious responsibility to acquire power and wealth. According

to Kenyan law, corruption includes a wide range of offences from the high-level embezzlement of public funds to bribery, fraud, abuse of office, misappropriation of funds, extortion, conflict of interest, illegal payments and kickbacks, nepotism and favouritism, bid rigging, deceiving the principal, secret inducement, dealing with suspect property among others (ACECA, 2003; POCAMLA, 2009).

The Chief of Missions in Kenya noted that “Corruption is undermining Kenya’s future. It threatens Kenya’s economic growth, security, and the provision of government services. People don’t get the benefit of their taxes because the money has disappeared into someone’s pocket. It also portends irredeemable long-term opportunity costs and compromises people’s futures and their development” (Chiefs of Mission in Kenya, 2014, April 13). There are no better words to explain corruption and its consequences to the society (rich or poor) than the words of the late Kofi Annan, the former UN Secretary General: “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” (Annan, 2004, p iii.)

Yes, corruption destroys and breaks down governance and public administrative frameworks, laid down rules and regulations, societal norms and practices, personal value system, set visions and agendas and steals the opportunities of ordinary people to progress and to prosper.

## Education and Public Awareness

Besides the criminal nature of corruption, it is also a behavioural problem influenced by one’s mindset, attitudes, inclinations, value system, desires and environmental factors. To correct a mindset, attitudinal, dispositional, and value based ill, education is key. Education is the process of imparting or facilitating the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values. Francis J. Brown remarks that Education is a process that brings about changes in the behaviour of society. It is a process which enables every individual to effectively participate in the activities of society and to make positive contribution to the progress of society.

Public awareness refers to the dissemination of information and knowledge to raise public understanding, consciousness and sensitivity about the importance and implications of a certain matter to them. Awareness is the state of being conscious of something; it is the ability to directly know and perceive, feel or be cognizant of an event. Therefore, Education and public awareness are essential to changing social and cultural norms that perpetuate harmful practices. Both education and public awareness are very important in enabling people to know and understand the problem, building their capacity solve the social problems bedevilling them; enabling people to make their own decisions and helping foster a sense of personal responsibility, and greater motivation and commitment.

## Theoretical Framework on Factors that Influence Corrupt Behaviour

The basic question that baffles many scholars and practitioners is: Why do people engage in corrupt behaviour knowing very well that corruption is an illegal, wicked, immoral, dishonest, and unacceptable act that does great damage to the public? In other words, what propels and energises people to engage in corruption. The second principle for effective anti-corruption education and public awareness is the ability to explain the factors that clarify individuals or employees’ propensity or willingness to engage in corrupt behaviour.

A number of theories have been advanced to explain why people engage in corruption. These include organisational culture theory, socialisation theory, bad apple theory, and rational choice theory. Generally, the theories explain that the factors that give rise to corruption emanate from three sources: societal, institutional, and individual. At societal level, a bad culture, negative social norms and moral principles, tolerance to corrupt behaviour, and weak value systems explain why people engage in corruption. If there exists no strong opinion against corruption; if corruption is accepted as a common thing and if society is tolerant of corruption, then it is difficult to eradicate it. The organisational culture theory states that corrupt behaviour of a person is a result of

social (group) and overall culture of an organisation he/she is working in (De Graaf, 2007). Institutional corruption is influenced by many factors including weak systems, policies and procedures, considerable discretion for public officials, weak enforcement mechanisms, lack of professional ethics; negative organisational culture; poor and unethical leadership and limited accountability. The opportunity to commit fraud through an existing loophole or weakness in internal controls forms another factor for corrupt behaviour. A 2018 study by the Ethics and Corruption Commission (EACC, 2018) indicated that about half of the respondents were willing to engage in corruption, opportunity allowing. Corruption occurs where there is monopoly and discretion without accountability:  $C=M+D-A$  (Klitgaard, 1998, p. 4)

Then, there is the socialisation theory. Socialisation is the backbone on which human culture is developed. Del Fabbro notes that an individual's morality and ethics are shaped by the process of socialization, as well as modelling and education from parents and caregivers (Corruption Watch, 2013, June 25). Del Fabbro and Upadhyay argue that corruption is an anti-social activity learned through poor parenting (Corruption Watch, 2013, June 25). Sound family environments always carry on discipline, morals and obedience, good manners among other values and principles. However, despite good upbringing and socialisation, Myres (1994) in his book *Exploring Social Psychology* argues that nice, good people can become corrupt through excessive social pressure—pressure for money, pressure to measure up, pressure to belong and showcase. The pressure from children, spouse, extended family, peers and even community may disturb the mental balance of government and non-government officials.

The Rational Choice Theory describes a corrupt person as “rational beings attempting to further their own self-interest in a world of scarce resources” (Rose-Ackerman, 1978). To rationalise is to justify an illegal and corrupt behaviour; it is a form of denial, an attempt to neutralise feelings of ethical anxiety. Sometimes people rationalise their behaviour as answered prayers. Rationalisation takes the form of costs and benefits analysis. A person weighs the net benefit from corrupt activity against net benefits from remaining honest (Klitgaard, 1988). If net benefits from corruption are higher than net benefits from honesty, a person chooses to be corrupt. A person also weighs the severity of the punishments for the crime, probability of being detected, probability of being prosecuted and probability of the punishments being imposed (Carson, 2014). EACC reports indicate that one of the challenges that it faces is the lenient punishment that is sometimes meted on the offender vis a vis the crime and cost incurred. If the government imposes harsher penalties for corrupt officials, there would be less incentive to behave corruptly. This therefore calls not only for a strengthened legal framework but a robust education and public awareness programme and strategies that address the social-cultural, political, legal, and individual propensity or willingness to be corrupt.

## Legal Framework on Anti-Corruption Education and Public Awareness

The United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC), the only legally binding universal anti-corruption instrument, provides key tools to foster accountability, integrity, and transparency in times of crisis and beyond (UNODC, 2003). Article 5 paragraph 6 on Preventive anti-corruption policies and practices gives education, training and public awareness an upper hand as a measure to fight corruption.

The treaty recognises the importance of both preventive and punitive measures besides addressing the cross-border nature of corruption with provisions on international cooperation and on the return of the proceeds of corruption. Kenya's legal framework provides for various strategies in the promotion of integrity of all state and public officers and in combating corruption and economic crime. These include: investigations, Asset Tracing (tracing and recovering public property lost through corruption); Preventive measures, Education and Public Awareness and Promotion of standards and best practices in integrity and ethics.

The Anti-Corruption and Economic Crimes Act of 2003 (ACECA) section 7 (g) and the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC) Act of 2012 section 13 (a) and (b) give the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission a legal mandate to spur and lead public education campaigns to prevent, and ultimately, rid the country of corruption.

This function as provided for in Section 7 (1) (g), states inter alia: “to educate the public on the dangers of corruption and economic crime and to enlist and foster public support in combating corruption and economic crime.”

The Act mandates the Commission to: raise public awareness on what is ethical and proper; educate the public on the dangers of corruption; provide training on ethical behaviour and enlist public support in combating and preventing corruption. Education and public awareness certainly have a key place in holistic anti-corruption strategy, although, its effectiveness may not be immediate but long term. This chapter argues that though the punitive approach (retribution and restitution) is said to send very strong signal to the perpetrators of corruption and seems to be the favoured remedy for the public, it is an “after the fact” action. This means that corruption has already taken place. On the other hand, the preventive approach is “before the fact” action (before corruption takes place). This approach is in line with the old adage that an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. Although preventive measures are hard to sell to the public, they could yield better results in the long run, cognizant of the fact that prevention is far much cheaper than enforcement in terms of physical and mental energy, time, and money expended.

The question that comes to mind is why education and public awareness? Education, training, and awareness raising are seen as essential strategies in overcoming corruption. In fact, Transparency International categorically states that “Education is central to preventing corruption. Clear laws and regulations as well as well-designed institutions will not be able to prevent corruption unless citizens are educated, to demand accountability from government and institutions” (Hockenos, 2013, p. 341). Education is a potent tool that helps to create better societies with an in-depth knowledge of good virtues. Nelson Mandela posits that education is the most powerful weapon which governments and societies can use to change the world (Blair, 2021, p. 1). Societal change comes from the collective transformation of the individuals within that society and Education has been chiefly instrumental in preparing the way for the development, empowerment, and transformation of the individual. (It is an accepted fact that corruption starts at an individual level). Education brings about phenomenal changes in every aspect of people’s lives. The ultimate objective of anti-corruption education is to create a mindset that prompts new behaviours, attitudes and an environment conducive to the emergence of a culture of integrity at all levels. Education fosters positive attitudes and behaviours, promotes personal integrity, civic responsibility and re-engineers a new value system and culture change through the acquisition of desired knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach is required to prevent and combat corruption effectively.

## Strategies

A comprehensive education and public awareness strategy includes comprehending the problem, knowing the target audiences involved or affected by the problem, knowing expected outcome, strategies or methodologies to bring about the desired attitudinal or behavioural change. Public education and awareness in Kenya involves use of various forums and strategies including School based anti-corruption or curricula based approaches, community outreach, capacity building, billboards and media- in all its forms (TV, Radio, Print and Social media).

School based Anti-corruption education involves educating future citizens in the values of integrity, citizenship, respect for the rule of law, transparency, accountability, and democracy. Values and principles are very important in the education of our children. Giussani observes that “The fundamental idea in the education of the young is the fact that it is through the younger generations that society successfully rebuilds itself: therefore, the primary concern of society is to teach the youth” (Guissani, 2019). In view of this, the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission launched several initiatives targeting children and youth such as Curriculum based interventions (school-based programmes), including Integrity Clubs; Training of Integrity Club patrons, curriculum support materials targeting young learners, sponsorship of Music and Drama festivals, among others. The programmes aim at re-engineering social values, building skills such as leadership skills, organisational skills;

and public speaking skills and values such as patience, orderliness, honesty, problem solving, and decision making, among others.

Civic education and engagement campaigns involve County Public Education Forums, Outreach Clinics/Anti-Corruption Weeks, commemoration of the international Anti-Corruption Day, participation in International Trade Fairs, Community Based Anti-Corruption Monitors (CBAMs) Training, and Training of Opinion leaders at the grassroots' level to create ownership of the anti-corruption messages. A public awareness campaign is not just billboards, television commercials, social media, or fundraising. UNCAC through its various conference resolutions, identifies various audiences or stakeholders to be involved in the anti-corruption education. These includes civil society, youth and children, the public sector, and the private sector among others. Article 13 of UNCAC calls on State parties to promote active participation of individuals and groups outside of the public sector in the prevention of and the fight against corruption and to raise public awareness regarding the existence, causes, and gravity of and the threat posed by corruption. The article provides for awareness-raising programmes for young people at various levels of the education system. It can therefore be argued that anticorruption education programmes involve both Civic Education and School Based Education.

The use of very robust vernacular radio and TV stations and national radio FM stations and TV to inform the public on the evils of corruption serves as a means to easily pass the information to the public and raise desired awareness. The questions of what is the message and who is the messenger and what techniques are to be used in passing the message are fundamental. Noteworthy is the fact that the anti-corruption message has to be specific, content that is relevant and well packaged for public consumption, and in a language that the media can disseminate. Content must meet public interests and public needs. Therefore, multiple components such as messaging, grassroots outreach, media relations, government affairs, and budgeted amounts help reach a specific goal. Noteworthy is the fact that anti-corruption education strategies are designed with longevity in mind.

## Corruption Perception Index Score for Kenya

Further, the Corruption Perception Index Score for Kenya (Transparency International, 2021) in the past five years (2017 to 2021) has averaged at about 28 points out of 100 (See Table 1 below). It's noteworthy that there was a steady rise in Kenya's score and ranking under the TI Corruption Perception Index (CPI) from 144th out of 180 countries with a score of 27/100 in 2018, to 124th in 2020. The improved score for Kenya is also attributed to placing emphasis on high-impact investigations involving high profile individuals, high value assets and high levels of public interest. Assets valued at over KES 25 billion have been recovered in the last 5 years. However, Kenya still scored below 32, the Sub-Saharan average score. Sub-Saharan Africa is the lowest performing region on the CPI, underscoring a need for urgent action. The CPI measures the perceived levels of public sector corruption in countries and territories worldwide. Kenya's score may seem to demonstrate that efforts to tackle corruption have produced limited results. This contributes to the impression that corruption in Kenya is more rampant than it actually is and consequently affects our ranking in indices that rely on perception.

What is the puzzling question? Could it be that Kenya's broad constitutional rights and freedoms give Kenyans space to speak about corruption more freely than in most African states. Could it be that Kenya's anti-corruption education and public awareness has achieved its intended goal of sensitising the public about corruption such that people are aware about it? Could it be that the CPI is not a reliable index.

Table 1: Kenya's CPI Score last five years

Year	Score	Ranking
2021	30	128/180
2020	31	124/180
2019	28	137
2018	27	144/175
2017	28	143

Source: Transparency International (2021)

Kenya has lately been in the limelight for numerous cases of corruption especially in the public sector. Mega corruption scandals hit Kenya between 2018 and 2021 involving major state corporations leading to the loss of billions of shillings. These include the National Youth Service involving KES 791 million; Kenya Pipeline Company (KPC), involving KES 2 billion; National Cereals and Produce Board (NCPB) maize scandal (KES 1.9 billion); National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF) KES 1 billion; and shoddy land transactions at the Ministry of Lands; The Standard Gauge Railway (SGR); Kenya Medical Supplies Authority (KEMSA) scandal involving COVID-19 Funds; Aror and Kimwarer dams scandal of 2019 leading to a loss of 19 billion; and Kenya Power and Lighting Company involving KES 200 million relating to the irregular procurement of transformers. Other state entities also named in media reports for corruption scandals include the Energy and Petroleum Regulatory Authority (EPRA) and now the Football Federation of Kenya among others (EACC TUKO, 2018). Ironically, Kenya is the 95<sup>th</sup> most competitive nation in the world out of 140 countries ranked in the 2019 edition of the Global Competitiveness Report, yet corruption is identified among the most pertinent competitive challenges facing firms in doing business in Kenya.

### **Corruption and the COVID-19 pandemic: The story of Kenya**

Times of crisis bring out the best and worst in us. The outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) created a crisis not only in Kenya but the world over. A crisis can create the perfect opportunity for corruption to thrive. The COVID-19 pandemic provided two opportunities. An opportunity to be innovative, and to rebuild the health sector systems and facilities and build trust in service delivery in view of the fact that a disease like COVID-19 was not a respecter of age, status, or position. It also provided an opportunity for increased levels of corruption through the manipulation of relaxed procurement regulations and oversight. Going by Steve Powell's corruption triangle theory, opportunity is one of the factors that drive corruption. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, adds, "it is even more damaging in times of crisis—as the world is experiencing now with the COVID-19 pandemic" (Guterres, n.d.)

In an environment of high pressure and uncertainty, there is a considerable risk that precious public resources will be captured, and decisions distorted by vested private interests. Documented risks range from the diversion of funds into private pockets by those exploiting emergency procurement processes, to the design of rescue packages that favour industries and companies with the most skilful lobbyists—rather than those most in need. This undermines the common good and comes at the expense of public welfare. Corruption can cripple recovery and growth in the aftermath of crises. Building back better to increase future resilience has often meant short-term public subsidies, reconstruction efforts in the medium term and extensive infrastructure upgrades in the longer term—areas highly vulnerable to corruption (Transparency International, March 2021).

Kenya's media houses run a mix of troubling headlines on corruption in Kenya during the COVID-19 pandemic. A sample of the headlines include: *Kenya Lost Covid-19 Billions To Corruption – Audit Report*; *Corruption is Undermining Kenya's COVID-19 Response*; *COVID scandal shakes Kenya in latest African corruption drama*.

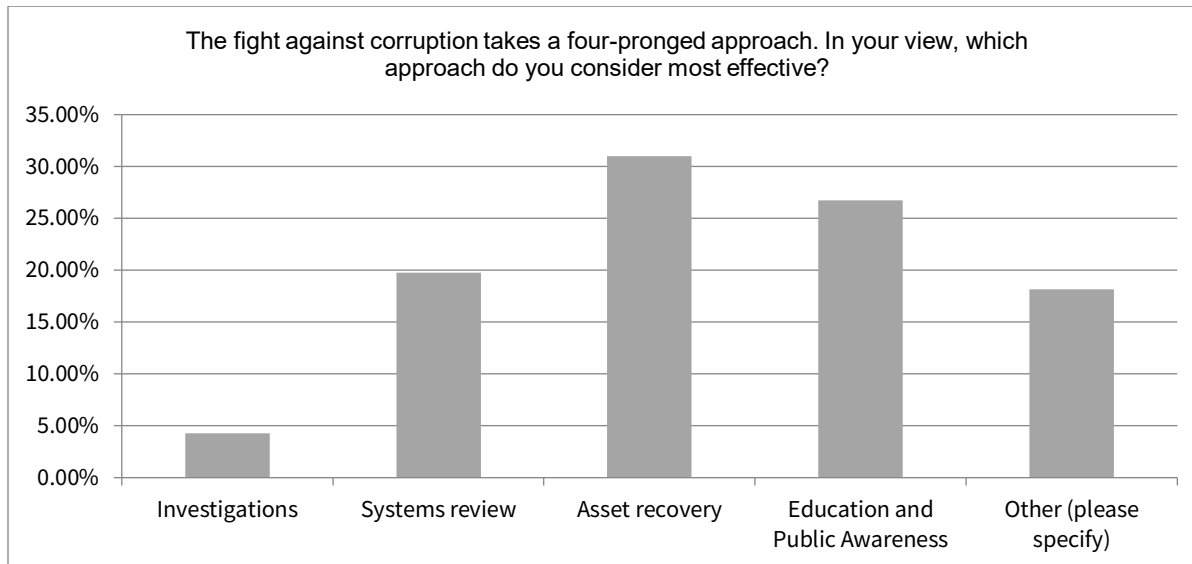
This study sought to establish if the media reports were anything to go by. The respondents of this study (69.02) percent indicated that the COVID-19 period in Kenya was characterised by increased corruption. About 23.37% said there was slight increase and only 7.61% stated that there was no increase in corruption during the period.

Asked to give their comments, those who said that there was an increase noted that levels of corruption were unprecedented, access to COVID tests and travel permits was an opportunity for bribe collection; Scrutiny for procurements and oversight was not fully executed; Globally the rapid response to the pandemic meant proper safeguards were not in place to prevent fraud and emergency procurement opened doors to corruption. One of the respondents who said No stated “I don't think it is possible to assess increase or decrease of corruption without reports that show that there was.” I think there is corruption always in Kenya and maybe now during this period.

## Study Findings

This study involving 190 respondents from different sectors of the economy established that Asset recovery (31.02%) was the most preferred and effective approach to the fight against corruption in Kenya, followed by Education and Awareness creation at 26.74%, Systems review at 19.79%, investigations at 4.28% and others at 18.18%. This finding is more or less in concurrence with the findings of EACC survey 2018 that rated imprisonment at No. 1 at 45.6% followed by Education and Public Awareness at 44.7% and mainstreaming of anti-corruption content into the education curriculum at 33.4%; however, asset recovery was rated low at 29.5%.

Figure 1: Approaches to combating Corruption



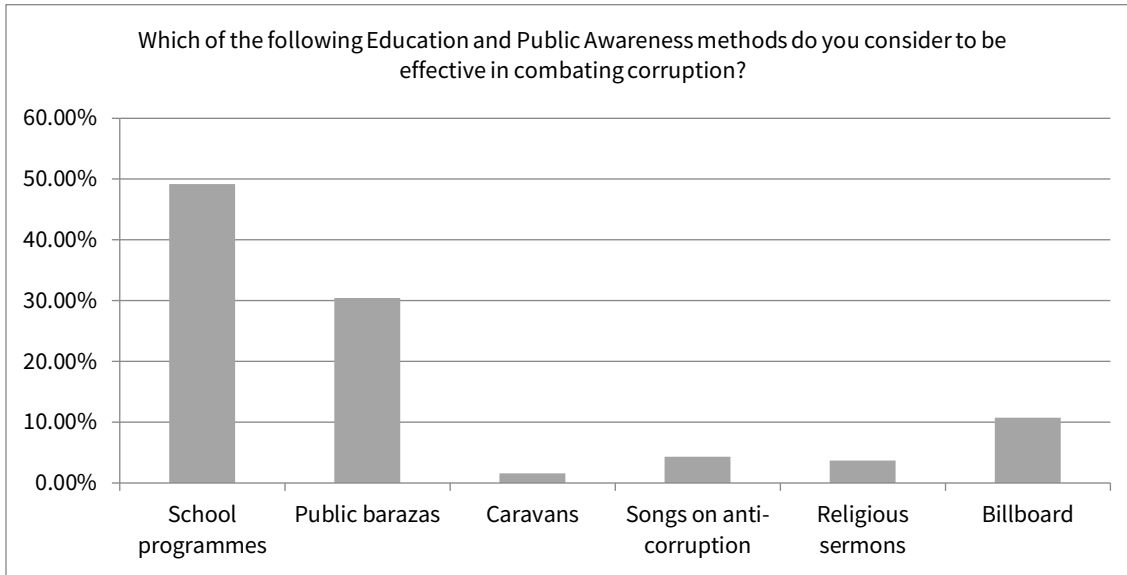
Source: Author

As noted above, sustained anti-corruption interventions and responses include enforcement, institutional reforms to limit authority, improve accountability, freedom of information, open budget systems and financial disclosures; and societal reforms aimed at changing attitudes and mobilising political will.

In view of this finding, anti-corruption agencies need to re-think the place of Education and Public Awareness in efforts to combat corruption. During the author's stint as head of Education Training and Public Awareness (ETPA) at the EACC, the author championed strengthening the preventive strategies in relation to increased funding and reporting on successes of programmes and impact. This was often missed out followed by the silent rule of budgeting at about 70% for investigation, 30% for prevention.



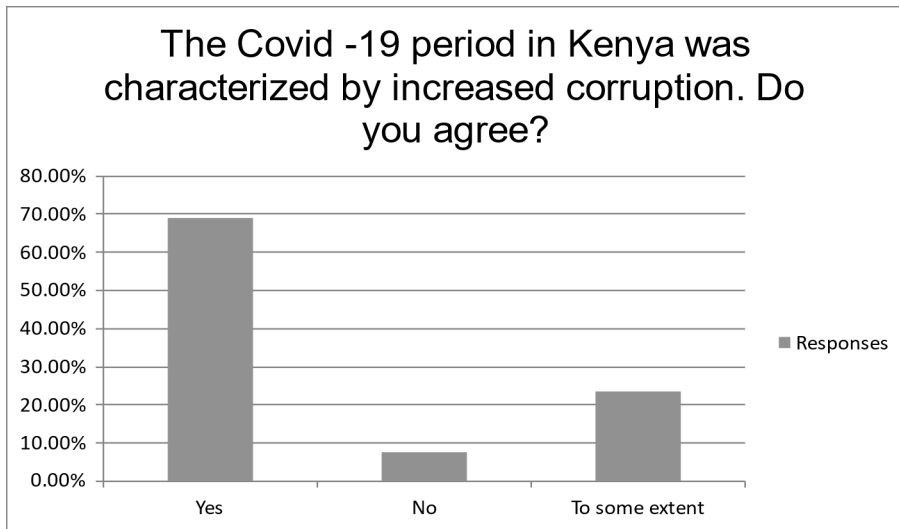
Figure 2: Education and Public Awareness Methods



Source: Author

When asked specifically about which methods of education and public awareness were best, the respondents identified mainstreaming ethics and integrity in school programmes as the most significant approach. This again is in agreement with the EACC report of 2018.

Figure 3: Perception of COVID-19 and Corruption in Kenya



Source: Author

During the COVID-19 period, media in Kenya was awash with reports of corruption and unethical practices curtailing efforts to successfully respond to COVID-19. Reports denoting cases of bribery and collusion; disregard of the rule of law; deceiving the principal; conflicts of interest; fraud; procurement of substandard masks,

sanitizers, PPEs, water tanks; favouritism or discrimination in the issuance of PPEs; and the misuse of funds generously donated to fight against COVID-19. Reports of corruption cartels, imposters conning businesses, and unscrupulous individuals were the order of the day. Corruption, like COVID-19, is an issue that adversely affects the social, political, and economic activities of any government's industry and commerce. Like other countries, Kenya suffered a double tragedy of corruption and COVID-19.

But what happened in Kenya is truly astounding. Stories of theft of funds and medical supplies were reported at the very start of the pandemic. A donation of PPE from the Chinese billionaire Jack Ma apparently went "missing" from Nairobi's international airport sometime between March and May 2020; over \$400 million in donations to Kenya disappeared in the first six months of the pandemic and in July 2020, Kenyans were dismayed to learn that a cash transfer programme intended to help low-income people deal with COVID-19's economic impact did not actually benefit those recipients, due to corruption and other irregularities (Igunza, 2020). A study by Human Rights Watch found that officials in charge of disbursing the funds frequently ignored eligibility criteria for beneficiaries, and in some cases, directed the funds to relatives or friends. There were allegations of the misuse of \$7.8m meant to purchase emergency PPE for healthcare workers and hospitals across the country. The loss of billions 2.3bn Kenyan shillings (\$21m; £16m) caused a public outcry. In August 2020, massive irregularities at the state-run Kenya Medical Supplies Authority (KEMSA) were revealed, including flouting procurement regulations and misusing public and donor funds earmarked for the country's COVID-19 response. KEMSA is responsible for procuring drugs and other medical supplies for more than 6,000 health facilities across the country (Gul, 2020).

Moreover, in August, health workers went on strike over poor working conditions and lack of supplies. There were riots by medics everywhere causing more fear and gloom as citizens suffered and died. Doctors and nurses complained about a lack of PPE as the country battled the COVID-19 outbreak. Doctors also claimed that misappropriation of funds may have led to the deaths of some patients. The Health Minister in Machakos County added: "Definitely, that can be correlated with deaths. And it's true to say then that corruption led to deaths in this country." Some took to social media to show the sub-standard gloves, hazmat suits, and face shields that had allegedly been distributed by the government. In view of all these media reports, one cannot fail to ask: Was corruption as deadly as the COVID-19 pandemic itself?

## What Strategies Were Put in Place?

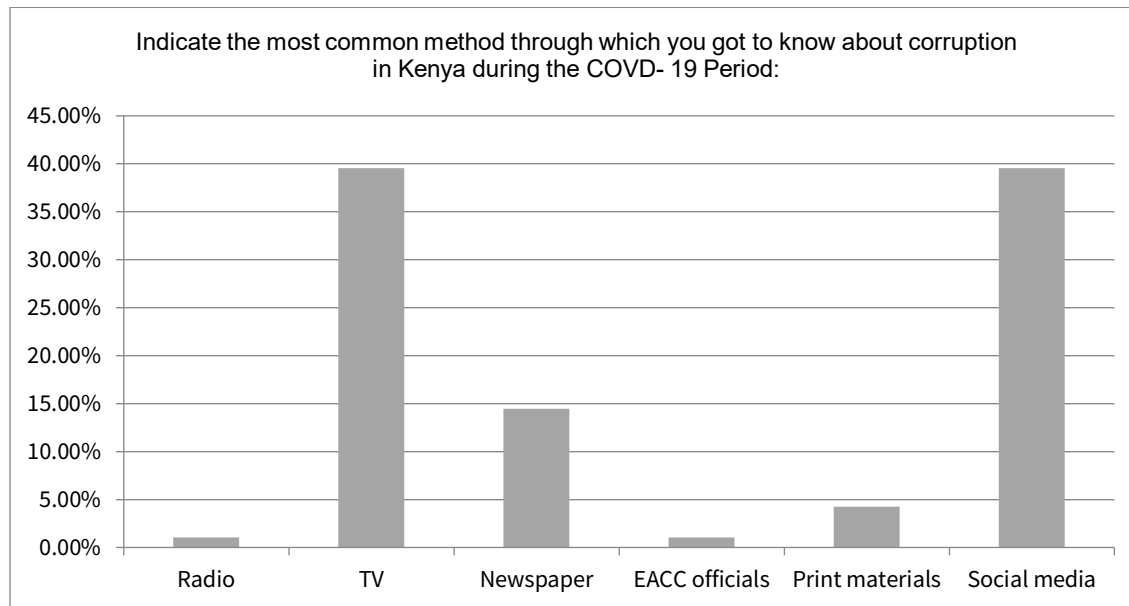
"Countries will not succeed in their recovery efforts if they don't also tackle corruption," Hence, President Uhuru Kenyatta promised to get to the bottom of the KEMSA saga. On August 26, he ordered investigating agencies to finalise investigations of KEMSA within 21 days. In a report to a joint Senate Committee on Health and COVID-19 on Wednesday, the EACC said: "Investigations had established criminal culpability on the part of public officials in the purchase and supply of COVID-19 emergency commodities at Kenya Medical Supplies Authority (KEMSA) that led to irregular expenditure of public funds" (Igunza, 2020, September, 24). KEMSA flouted several laws in the awarding of tenders' worth about \$72 million. Besides investigations, an audit of KEMSA was undertaken. The audit report noted that KEMSA bosses colluded with companies that were given contracts. Some of the companies were registered around the time the country recorded its first COVID-19 case. Items were overpriced and some procured in excess and are still at KEMSA warehouses.

Kenya's national television stations run very robust education and public awareness programmes on COVID, corruption, governance, and rising cases of domestic violence among others. In a world turned upside down by the pandemic, TV broadcasts provided essential updates on health measures and corruption incidents and modes of reporting. They also provided solace to scores of people cut off from their loved ones or stuck in their homes, workplaces, and hospitals. As the health crisis unfolded, TV stations and to some extent radio responded to the public's thirst for information with success.

Though the study indicated a low score of radio, other countries such as Spain, the study by Rodero (2020) recorded an increase in radio consumption during the pandemic of almost one point. The BBC puts increased

consumption at 18%. In Italy, according to the Association of European Radios, the number of listeners has increased by 2.4%. In the United States there has been a 28% increase in consumption. “Radio (...) has been the window through which the population has scrutinised the evolution of the pandemic, day by day,” he adds (UNRIC Brussels, n.d.). It provides key information on government restrictions, health measures, ever-rising case numbers as well as updates on the roll-out of the vaccine. In India, 82% of the population has been listening to radio during the pandemic with a 23% increase.

Figure 4: Education Methods



Source: Author

Though the COVID-19 pandemic period 2020 turned the entire world upside down with unprecedented economic and social disruption, it opened opportunities for innovation, ingenuity, and change in the way of doing things. The National Integrity Academy remained active despite the challenges posed by the pandemic. In the author's capacity as Head of the National Integrity Academy, I seized the opportunity and dared to dream. I saw the COVID-19 Period as an opportunity for innovation. The Academy organised and hosted a series of virtual seminars and conferences at the national and international levels. In collaboration with other stakeholders such as the African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM), Ministry for Gender, Youth and Public Service, and the Kenya School of Government, the National Integrity Academy of the Commission employed the use of online webinars and Conferences that attracted participants and resource persons from across the globe. It organised the first Virtual Conference on the theme Promoting Integrity, Accountability and Transparency in the Public Service Administration during the COVID-19 period and beyond. Over 200 participants registered for the conference. The second virtual conference on the theme Culture Change focusing on the Centrality of Leadership in Fostering an Ethical Culture in the public service and society. The conference discussed the role of leaders in cultivating and shaping a positive, accountable, life giving, and ethical culture in the public service. The conference's intent was to emphasise that fostering an ethical culture is an intentional activity. An ethical culture does not just happen spontaneously. It must be developed and nurtured through persistent action. As a result of the capacity building workshops, the number of corruption reports increased and

government employees became knowledgeable of the existing legal framework for the fight against corruption and unethical conduct.

The study respondents were asked to indicate the most common method through which they got to know about corruption during the COVID-19 period. As Table 4 shows, television, social media, and newspaper were the three key outstanding methods.

## Conclusion

Without a doubt, the study established that education and public awareness play a critical role in the fight against corruption during times of crisis. While policymakers play a crucial role in ending corruption, Education and Public Awareness ought to be made a central and visible part of the country's response to corruption. An anti-corruption education and public awareness programme is the first step in shifting mindsets and empowering societies to act. Through education, all stakeholders are given a voice, a voice that gets strengthened by acquiring new knowledge, values, and skills and perspectives. That voice must be heard. Corruption will only be minimized when people work together to change the system. The study established the education strategies that are considered effective in reaching the public.

## References

- Blair, I. (2021). *Is education the most powerful weapon we have for changing the world?* University of Cambridge. <https://newn.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Blair-Iona-1.pdf>
- Chiefs of Mission in Kenya. (2014, April 13). *Corruption undermines Kenya's efforts to fight terrorism*. Standard Digital. <http://www.standardmedia.co.ke/?articleID=2000109288>
- Einstein, A. (n.d.) *goodreads*. Quotes. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/10196552-in-the-midst-of-every-crisis-lies-great-opportunity>
- Carson, L. D. (2014). *Deterring corruption: Beyond Rational Choice Theory*. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2520280> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2520280>
- Dahl, A. L. (2016). *Corruption, morality and religion*. International Environment Forum blog. <http://iefworld.org/ddahl161>
- De Graaf, G. (2007). Causes of corruption: Towards a contextual theory of corruption. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 31(1/2), 39–8
- Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission [EACC]. (2018). National Ethics and Corruption Survey. ETHICS EACC Research Report No. 9 of May 2019.
- Giussani, L. (2019). *The Risk of education*. McGill Queens Publishing.
- Gul, M. (2020, December 13). Medical Mystery. D +C. <https://www.dandc.eu/en/article/thefts-covid-19-medical-supplies-highlight-kenyas-corruption-problem>
- Guterres, A. (n.d.). Statement on corruption in the context of COVID-19. United Nations, COVID Response. <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/statement-corruption-context-covid-19>
- Hockenos, P. (2013). Mapping civil society approaches to teaching anti-corruption and integrity in schools. In Transparency International, *Global Corruption Report* (pp. 341–348). Routledge.
- Igunza, E. (2020, September 24). *Coronavirus corruption in Kenya: Officials and businesspeople targeted*. BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-54278417>
- Klitgaard, R. (1998). International Cooperation Against Corruption. *Finance and Development*, 35(1), 3–6.
- Klitgaard, R. (1988). *Controlling Corruption*. University of California Press.
- Merriam-Webster. (2023). Dictionary. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/crisis>
- Psychology of Corruption. (2013) *Heroes and Zeros*. *Corruption Watch*. <https://www.corruptionwatch.org.za/the-psychology-of-corruption/>
- Myers, D. G. (1994). *Exploring social psychology*. McGraw-Hill Book Company.

- Rhodes, N. (2020) Transparency International: Corruption and the coronavirus. <https://www.transparency.org/en/news/corruption-and-the-coronavirus>
- Rodero, E. (2020). Radio: the medium that best copes in crises. Listening habits, consumption, and perception of radio listeners during the lockdown by the Covid-19. *El profesional de la información*, 29(3). <https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.may.06>
- Rose-Ackerman, S. (1978). *Corruption: A Study in Political Economy*. Academic Press.
- Star. (2022, June 22). *Corruption main hurdle to trade in Kenya - survey*. Star. <https://www.the-star.co.ke/business/kenya/2022-06-22-corruption-main-hurdle-to-trade-in-kenya-survey/>
- Transparency International. (2021). *Corruption Perception Index 2021*. <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2021>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC]. (2003). *United Nations Convention Against Corruption*. [https://www.unodc.org/documents/brussels/UN\\_Convention\\_Against\\_Corruption.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/brussels/UN_Convention_Against_Corruption.pdf)
- UNRIC Brussels. (n.d.). Radio provides solace during COVID-19 pandemic. United Nations COVID Response. <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/radio-provides-solace-during-covid-19-pandemic>
- World Bank. (1997). Helping countries combat corruption: The role of the World Bank. Understand Poverty. Research and Publications. Documents and Reports. <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/799831538245192753/helping-countries-combat-corruption-the-role-of-the-world-bank>