

1st Place

The Impact of Corruption on Jamaica's Development

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Corruption, which is defined as the abuse of public office for private gains (Bracking, 2010), is a debilitating cancer which aggressively erodes the cogs of a country's machinery thereby bringing production and growth to a grinding halt. It is practically impossible for production, social and economic advancement, equality and transparency to coexist with such a malady. For many years Jamaica has been grappling with this scourge, but the fight it seems, has left Jamaica socially bruised and financially battered. The recent passing of the man hailed as Singapore's founding father, Le Kuan Yew, serves to reignite a long standing comparative analysis of Singapore's development and Jamaica's economic regression. This is because both Jamaica and Singapore were once colonies of Britain and both gained their independence in the 1960's. The difference then was that Jamaica's thriving agriculture and mining sector as well as its booming tourism industry, placed it in a far more advantageous financial position to its counterpart, since at the time, Singapore was known as a British naval base (Henry, 2013). However, 50 years later Singapore has been able to celebrate a per-capita GDP of US\$ 61,700, which is the seventh largest in the world and it also has the 11th largest foreign reserve in the World. Jamaica on the other hand has a per-capita GDP of US\$ 9,300, which is 108 times smaller than Singapore's (Henry, 2013). With Jamaica now ranked as one of the most corrupt in the world and Singapore as one of the least corrupt, one cannot help but infer that corruption must have been one of the prime factors in this noticeable and embarrassing disparity in both countries' economic progress. This paper will examine some of the most significant impacts that corruption has had on Jamaica's development.

When corruption goes unmitigated it has the tendency to evolve into a culture. This has been the case with Jamaica. Corrupt practices by citizens and public officials are often treated with high levels of nonchalance and indifference. Such an attitude is seen in some recent acts of corruption

that were identified. In one case, the Office of the Contractor General cited instances of nepotism, favouritism and conflicts of interest in a prominent former mayor: and current sitting councillor's award of government contracts. In another case, head of Jamaica's Customs Major Richard Reese, pointed out that some large industries that are allowed to import refined sugar duty-free for their production have been selling this on the retail market, which results in the government losing over \$100 million in revenues (Gleaner, 2015). There are myriads of other cases of corruption, but these never seem to attract enough public condemnation. Instead, they tend to receive the same proverbial utterance, "a Jamaica dis, a su it go". Such corrupt individuals continue to receive public support and in most cases little or no legal action is taken against them, which means they still continue to operate in their different capacities. In most cases too, many in the society revere these persons, especially those who are desirous of circumventing government fees, or bureaucratic red tapes. It is widely known that many public transport vehicles though defective, have been given a clean bill of health by Transport Authority Officials. It is also known that some communities do not pay for certain utilities. All of these are clear indication of a country that does not view corruption as a plague but rather a way of life. Such an attitude to corruption has earned Jamaica failing grades by various international ranking groups. One such group, Transparency International, has consistently released dismal rankings for Jamaica. According to Greg Christie, on the agency's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), a score of 10 is perceived to be 'clean' and 1 as 'corrupt'. For the past five consecutive years Jamaica has never been scored higher than 3.3 (Christie, 2012).

Once corruption has evolved into a culture, it tends to infect all levels of society including government. In some cases corrupt government officials use well needed resources that should be used to promote economic growth to satisfy their own interest. This is sometimes done in the

Labour Party and US\$2 million to the People's National Party" (Munroe, 2012). Despite receiving convictions for their crimes outside of Jamaica, both David Smith and Christopher Coke are yet to be convicted in Jamaica for such crimes. It is situations like these that have led Greg Christie to declare that, "beyond promises made, there is nothing that the Government has done to send a persuasive signal that it is serious about fighting corruption." (Luton, 2014). Matters like these are no secret to investors, and they are therefore sceptical about investing in such a corrupt economic climate.

Corruption also significantly challenges democracy. This is because corruption in its varied forms limits the constitutional rights of citizens to exercise their freedom to choose their desired leader through a free and fair voting process. When brute force and intimidation are employed, citizens are forced to simply vote for the leader that the don requires them to vote for (Leslie, 2010). These elected representatives usually fail to address the social and economic concerns of the people who they 'represent,' yet they are sure of a victory whenever there is an election. Situations like these do not only indicate an attack on democracy, but it is also a clear sign of human rights violation. In other places where individuals are not coerced to vote, they simply do not do so. This is because they have lost confidence in the democratic process. Pollsters' findings have predicted so far that in the next general elections, only 42% of those enumerated are likely to vote (Campbell, 2014). This figure indicates that it is less than half of the voting population that will be appointing the country's leaders. Such a situation means that Jamaica does not adequately reflect the democratic model.

In concluding, it was argued that corruption has the potential to evolve into a culture if it goes unmitigated, it has the propensity to retard social development, it limits government accountability, and it attacks democracy. **It** is evident that Jamaica's success is greatly dependent

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