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Democracy and Corruption: Comment

Philip E. Graves, Ph.D.*

First, I should indicate that I have very limited expertise in the area of broadly-defined "corruption," so I found Dr. Panday's article interesting. In particular, it was an eye-opener that corruption is a problem throughout society, not being limited to the public sector. The primary question, which kept re-emerging in my mind as I read the manuscript, was "Would it be possible to make recommendations that are more institutionally 'specific'?" In numerous places, valid general observations were made, a sampling here:

"Important foundational values of professionalism, dignity of labor, mutual fairness, law abidance, self-esteem, national honor, and so on have been lacking or ignored in steering the enterprise." "Controlling corruption requires building appropriate institutions, not dismantling what exists."

For me, there was insufficient concrete guidance given about how one would go about building those foundational values and institutions...they cannot just be "wished" into existence. The following two quotes also relate to a difficulty in dealing with corruption:

"Though one might need some technical help in such areas as developing appropriate legal framework, sound procurement practices, and accounting and auditing systems, they by themselves can do little in creating political commitment and in exercising political will for clean governance."

"Such work should be the responsibility of social leaders trusted by the people. Only social leaders can talk about higher motives and goals beyond what a personal utility maximizing political and economic man (woman), including the king, does and inspire the society."

I am worried that social leaders, trusted by the people, will become co-opted by corruption during the process of attaining leadership status—one might argue, cynically, that the organization of a political/leadership organization is

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very similar to a septic tank...the really large chunks float to the top! Could a Mahatma Gandhi emerge with effectiveness in the institutional setting of modern-day Nepal? I don't know. I suspect, though, that a very concrete set of actions—in the legal arena, in the courts, in accounting practices—must occur prior to (or simultaneously with) the emergence of potentially trusted social leaders before corruption in Nepal can be held to reasonable levels.