believers who are members of the organic church, both organized and unorganized. This has been done to have shared responsibility in corruption. We would discover how the Christian believers in one way or the other can become a party to corruption and thus may become responsible for such practice. We would also call the church a "society" for obvious reasons.


Good Management is Good Stewardship
Corruption Free Churches are Possible

- Christoph Stueckelberger*

Unanimously, the NCCI Quadrennial Assembly in 2004 approved a Plan of Action for Corruption free Churches in India and an NCCI Code of Leadership. Encouraging efforts of churches and partner agencies around the world give impulses to revive these efforts in NCCI churches. Churches are called to be God's good stewards as the good managers of His resources.

1) Becoming responsible stewards

"Who is the wise and prudent manager whom his master will put in charge of his slaves, to give them their allowance of food at the proper time?" (Luke 12,42) Jesus starts his parable of the good and the bad manager with this question. He shows three characteristics: The bad manager is lazy, beats his staff, is often drunken and abuses the entrusted resources. The good manager works hard, pays the salaries at time, has self-discipline, acts in a non violent way and uses the entrusted resources carefully, knowing that the owner can come anytime, asking for accountability.

The greek word for manager in this text is "oikonomos", the economist, the housekeeper, the steward. The good economist/manager in Christian terms cares for the manifold resources that God lent him or her, in a responsible way. Responsibility means to respond, to answer to God's call. The latin word "spondere" means "to give", "to sponsor". God sponsors his whole creation so that we as his creatures can have life in its fullness by grace (John 1,16). Human responsibility is the response to these gifts. Today, the Greek word "oikos", house, is present in three dimensions: economy, ecology and ecumenism: The responsible steward cares for the economy as the material basis of life in God's household, the earth; he/she cares for

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the ecology as the environmental basis of life in God’s household; he/she also cares for ecumenism as the spiritual basis for life and its inter-denominational, interreligious and intercultural community in the global household. The Christian steward, the caring manager, the responsible church leader cares, protects, guides, orders, serves and shares in all these three dimensions of God’s house, the earth. The Reformer John Calvin, who’s 500th anniversary is celebrated this year, wrote on the responsible use of resources in his Commentary on the books of Moses: “Everybody should remember that he is the treasurer of God in all what he possesses.”

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2) **Manifold resources on hand**

The principles, values and virtues of responsible leadership as responsible stewardship - as presented in the biblical stories and ethical values - are the basis for the responsible management of resources and for guidelines in applied ethics of leadership. Every church and Christian organization, being wealthy or poor, has normally much more resources on hand than one is aware. There are not only financial resources. Before complaining about poverty and begging, one can discover and properly manage what the organization already has. The first step is to discover the manifold resources that exist and not only the missing financial resources. We can discover 13 different types of resources usually available in an institution. They all can and have to be managed in a wise, professional and responsible way. 1 human resources (staff, boards, volunteers, physical, mental, emotional capabilities), 2 financial resources, 3 offered services (worship, education etc.) as resources, 4 knowledge and information resources, 5 networking resources (e.g. to be part of and strengthened by NCCCI), 6 communication resources, 7 innovation resources (innovative ideas), 8 natural resources (land, water, forests, air, energy), 9 spiritual resources (prayer, preaching, spiritual leadership), 10 material resources (real estate, infrastructure), 11 organizational resources (decision making structures, leading and controlling bodies, volunteers, legal basis), 12 time resources (effective management of time, efficiency, punctuality), 13 reputation resources (credibility, one of the most important and precious resources).

The story in Luke ends with the conclusion: “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.” (Luke 12:48) God gives a lot and he requires according accountability. In ethical terms: The size of power and resources to manage must correspond with the size of responsibility.

3) **Overcoming mismanagement and corruption**

One worldwide challenge of mismanagement and abuse of resources is corruption. Corruption is the abuse of public or private power for personal interests. In many societies, almost all sectors are affected such as government administration, the private sector, education, media and even religious organizations such as churches and associated institutions. Church land property is misappropriated, fraud weakens the church, buying votes for leadership elections undermine democratic procedures. Affected are churches not only in the South, but also in the North. Twenty percent of American congregations lose money to people entrusted with church finances, according to a 2005 Newsday article. And some partner agencies - in the past, no longer today - closed their eyes about corruption in the partner churches. Huge amount of money gets lost and is lacking to serve the goals of the organization and to develop the church and its mission. In addition, the reputation damage for churches and the credibility of the Gospel is enormous. Churches are part of the problem and part of the solution. Efforts of individual church leaders, of church synods, control bodies, Christian educational institutions, Christian media, Christian regional councils, mission societies and partner agencies in fighting and overcoming corruption are substantially growing.

Various forms of corruption have to be distinguished: Big corruption is the corruption with huge amount of money involved, e.g. when a company bribes a minister of energy to get the assignment to build a power station or in other infrastructure projects. Big corruption is normally motivated by extending power and winning economic competition. The opposite is the small corruption, often motivated by poverty, e.g. of the policemen whose salary is not sufficient to feed
the family. Acceleration corruption aims at getting services in time whereas without bribes it would be delivered – e.g. from the customs – with serious delays. Monetary and non-monetary form of corruption can be distinguished, when services are asked for or paid with money or with non-monetary forms such as sexual services or awards and positions. Grey corruption is in a grey zone of collusion, nepotism and favoritism where not necessarily bribes are paid, but decisions are taken without transparent and agreed criteria. Grey corruption is in the grey zone of collusion, nepotism and favoritism where not necessarily bribes are paid, but decisions are taken without transparent and agreed criteria.

4) **Encouraging recent examples**

In Australia, in July 2009 the former church leader Rev. Preston called for more decisive actions of churches against corruption, saying that “if we fail to challenge corruption we fail to love our neighbour.”

In Tanzania, in May 2009 religious representatives challenged Africa’s political leadership to ensure the active participation of their citizens in discussions on the implementation of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). Churches in Tanzania published theological and educational material to fight corruption.

In Ghana, in April 2009, religious leaders from protestant, catholic and muslim communities attended a two-day workshop on “Zero tolerance against corruption, the role of religious bodies in Ghana”. They admitted that there is serious corruption within the churches and decided on programs against it. They identified greed, selfishness, envy, opulence, flagrant flaunting of wealth as some of the drivers at the wheels of corruption in the churches.

In Liberia, in 2008, the Liberia Council of Churches, in collaboration with churches, organizations and in partnership with World Vision, Liberia, tackled corruption and impunity under the theme “Prayer and Action against Corruption and Impunity and the Need for Reconciliation in Liberia.”

In Germany, in February 2009, Bread for the World and the Protestant Development Service EED held a conference “Courage to Transparency”, developing concrete strategies for corruption prevention and against corruption in development and emergency work and in Churches.

In Germany, in 2008, protestant development agencies and Transparency international Germany published a study on corruption in development work and instruments against it.

- In Kalimantan/Indonesia, in February 2009, Protestant, Catholic and Muslim youth organizations promised at a church meeting to take action against corruption, violence and environmental degradation.

- In India, church representatives and specialized organizations undertook, since at least 2000, various efforts to reduce corruption. In USA, leaders of evangelical churches and evangelical TV stations have been accused of corruption and started campaigns against it.

- In Nairobi, based on a resolution against corruption at the General Assembly in 2004, the All Africa Conference of Churches AACC implemented 2005-2008 a program with a social audit to improve concrete administrative mechanisms against corruption in AACC and member churches, combined with regional and sub-regional seminars with church leaders.

5) **Concrete instruments to overcome corruption**

**Theology**

1 *Renew the theology of leadership* : leadership in the church has to be seen as a service. Servant leadership is characterized by modesty. Spiritual leadership based on deep roots in faith is needed. The professional ethics of pastors and leaders needs to be strengthened in theological education.

2 *Election rules* should include anticorruption clauses where only persons who sign a code of conduct that they do not buy votes and pay bribes can be candidates. Many states now have rules for members of parliament and governments that they have to openly declare their assets at the beginning and end of term.

3 *Salaries in leadership positions* have to be fair, which means sufficient for a modest life in dignity (and to be increased if it is not the case), linked up with anti corruption clauses in the job contract.

**Governance**

1 *Courses on governance and financial management* should be compulsory in the theological education and should be offered to church leaders who do not have that experience.

2 *Independent and credible financial audits and performance audits* for all church related institutions increase responsible stewardship.
3 **Peer Review Mechanisms** (e.g. a team from different NCCI member churches visits a member church for review and recommendations on the implementation of certain decisions taken by NCCI) strengthens mutual accountability and the community of churches.\(^2\)

4 **Regulations of Expenses and their implementation** should be reviewed with the criteria of good management of limited resources.

5 **Whistleblowers’ protection** should become standard in churches as it is more and more the case in national laws and also in the private sector. Churches should nominate an independent office to receive whistleblowers information and undertake appropriate investigations.

6 **Audited annual financial reports** should be made available to the public in order to increase transparency control by the church members.

**Resources**

1 **Land and real estate property of Churches** has to be managed in an efficient and transparent manner with transparent planning and tender procedures, market prices while selling property, professional property committees.\(^3\)

2 **An Indian Christian Real Estate Program CIREP** could be launched together with donor partners to improve the efficient use of these resources through mutual learning.

3 **Careful development and control of pension funds** and other social security systems of church staff helps to avoid losses by speculation or abuse of funds.\(^4\)

**Gender**

Fighting corruption is also a gender issue. Various studies show that women tend to be less corrupt than men\(^5\) because they are rather less involved in collusion and are careful in using financial resources. The micro-credit movements have proven this.

1 **Strengthening women’s participation in church leadership positions** and financial audit tasks can contribute to reducing corruption. Women’s ordination is in many churches de facto a precondition for leadership positions.

2 **Christian women’s organizations** should have the right to property of land and real estate which is not under the authority of the church. In some countries it is not yet possible.

3 **Fighting sexual harassment and abuse** as a non-monetary form of corruption, and abuse of an official position of power for personal benefit, can be addressed through a church workgroup which can bring concrete proposals, recommendations and measures.

**Courts and media**

1 **Bringing cases of corruption to court** may be necessary even if extrajudicial solutions within the respective church may be tried first. It sends a clear signal to church members and the public on the commitment of the church in overcoming corruption.

2 **Christian and secular media** have to be respected and strengthened in their quality and independency, and have to be reminded to report in fairness in order to fulfill their important role of information and control by the public.

**6 Implementing the NCCI Plan of Action 2004**

I had the privilege to participate in the Pre-Assembly to the Quadrennial Assembly of NCCI in 2004 which prepared the NCCI plan of action against corruption. During three days of discussions participants from the different member churches from all parts of the country, the plan was developed and unanimously approved by the NCCI General Assembly.

Many churches are strong in meaningful statements, but they are often not strong enough in implementing them and defining clear and measurable steps which can be monitored. This can undermine the credibility of the churches because their statements are then no longer taken as seriously as they should be. I therefore hope that NCCI and its member churches can renew their commitment to implement the 2004 plan of action and code of leadership.

**Concrete steps, for example, can be**

- to include the Code of Leadership in theological education and leadership trainings and to win a majority of pastors, leaders of churches, Christian schools and diaconal institutions, regional church bodies pastors to sign it;
- to identify a number of test church schools, parishes and diocesan administration and declare them as “corruption free zones” with respective monitoring mechanisms (Christian schools in five West African countries did it with success);
- NCCI to ask the member churches to send in two years a report on efforts taken to implement the plan of action;
- To elaborate liturgical, educational and legal training material
against corruption for churches;
- To build peer-to-peer monitoring structures so that a small group of NCCI representatives from different churches visits a church or diocese and makes a progress report (as it is done e.g. within the Development Committee DAC of OECD with the member states).

The time is ripe. The efforts against corruption are worldwide. Therefore, support by partners, governments and private sector actors are possible. Also the legal frame became much stronger during the last ten years if we look at the OECD guidelines which have now to be implemented by national laws in the OECD countries and oblige private companies to abstain from bribes. Otherwise they risk to be brought to court (even if the legal implementation of these sanctions is still not strong enough).

It would be a great encouragement for the churches in India and a strong signal for other churches worldwide if NCCI with its member churches would set a clear program with priorities and timelines to implement some steps of the 2004 plan of action – for the sake of responsible stewardship as response to God’s manifold gifts he daily gives to the churches. Overcoming corruption shall be done to the glory of God.

Sources
- Christoph Stueckelberger: Continue Fighting Corruption. Experiences and Tasks of Churches and mission societies, Bern 2003.*
- Christoph Stueckelberger/J.N.K. Mugambi: Responsible Leadership. Global and Contextual perspectives, WCC Geneva 2007 (includes the NCCI Plan of Action).*

* These books and many articles on ethics and corruption can be downloaded for free from www.globethics.net/library

Endnotes:
1 Christoph Stueckelberger/J.N.K. Mugambi: Responsible Leadership, Geneva 2007, online downloadable www.globethics.net/library.
2 Peer Review Mechanisms are important instruments e.g. of the OECD Development Committee DAC or the NEPAD in Africa.
3 A good example is the property management program 2008-2013 of the All Africa Conference of Churches with the goal to become financially self reliant with the efficient management of properties.
4 Some cases of fraud are known where contributions to the pension fund of church employees have been transferred to private accounts of church leaders.