

CITIZENS' EMPOWERMENT THROUGH FIGHTING CORRUPTION

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The transition in Romania brought about, besides a range of important social-economic and political changes, an unprecedented amplification of the corruption phenomenon which manifests with increasing intensity in most of fields of human activities. The setting-up of the market economy mechanisms has represented a profitable terrain for the flourishing of corruption and its extension in the entire social life. So, nowadays many analysts say that it is generalized and institutionalized.

The failure to eradicate this cancer of our society poses major obstacles in creating a healthy business climate needed to bring in vital investments, in poverty reduction and reaching of a higher level of life. And, unfortunately, the most corrupt are high-ranked officials who extort big bribes and state funds in their own interest.

At the base level, the most frequent corruption acts happen in the administration sector where the use of public function for private gain and its sale as a good is a main way to maximize benefits and economic interests. This was rationale to choose "The case of the Mayor Lutzu" as an empirical case in Romania.

Introduction

Our paper responds to the invitation of the World Bank to frontally address issues of empowerment not only in development projects and practice, but also through social research. We have been directly inspired by Deepa Narayan's books about *Empowerment* and about *Voices of the Poor*, and by the World Development Report (2001) that made a path-breaking theoretical and policy link between empowerment and poverty reduction.

The challenge to us has been to place the empowerment issues within the Romanian context and Romanian realities. As you all know, it is a lot easier to speak and praise empowerment than to actually capture, "measure" and quantify it sociologically as a distinct variable.

We thought hard on how we can identify what is usually named a "strategic research site" which would enable us to lay our hands more directly on this process of empowerment, in order to "capture it in action," grasp it, measure its emergence, dynamics, and manifestations.

Finally, our search for a strategic research site resulted in a choice that holds great interest on its own.