

# Anti-corruption awards empower citizens to fight corruption

2016  
NATIONAL  
CITIZENS'  
INTEGRITY AWARDS  
WERE LAUNCHED



Winners of the National Citizens' Integrity Awards 2024 pose for a photo. PHOTOS/COURTESY

To end corruption, a moral cancer that has reached endemic levels, citizens, who are the most affected, cannot remain on the periphery.

BY DEOGRATIUS WAMALA

According to Article 17 of the Constitution, the fight against corruption is a responsibility entrusted to citizens. However, without proper empowerment and knowledge, many fall short in fulfilling this obligation.

To bridge this gap, civil society organisations such as ActionAid International Uganda and its partners have stepped in to empower citizens with the ultimate goal of eradicating poverty. One of their key initiatives is the National Citizens Integrity Awards, a platform that enables citizens to honor civil servants who exhibit exemplary integrity.

Mr Xavier Ejoyi, the Country Director of ActionAid International Uganda, emphasised the organization's commitment to anti-corruption initiatives, highlighting their belief in its necessity.

"Corruption keeps the most vulnerable people in a perpetual cycle of poverty for generations. Rather than focusing on individuals, we collaborate with civil society organizations to amplify our voices for greater impact," he said.

Mr Ejoyi underscored the importance of collective action, noting that while each organisation may fight corruption differently, working together yields better results. He also stressed that citizens' voices must be heard, as fighting corruption is a constitutional obligation.

"To end this moral cancer that has reached endemic levels, citizens, who are the most affected, cannot remain on the periphery," he added.

## Achievements and growth

Over the past eight years, the awards have



Justice Canon James Ogola, Dr Mary Munyagwa, the overall winner of the frontline service award and Mr Xavier Ejoyi, the Country Director of Action Aid International-Uganda.



People turned up in large numbers to witness the 2024 National Citizens' Integrity Awards.

expanded in scope, geographic coverage, and participation. Last year alone, 743 public officers were nominated; this year, the number soared to 4,118.

The growing participation is a testament to the citizens' increasing engagement in the fight against corruption.

## Insights from anti-corruption experts

Mr James Onying Penyi, Director for Education, Research, and Advocacy at the Inspectorate of Government (IGG), noted the collusion often seen between junior and senior officers in corruption cases. He pointed out that while junior officers frequently bear

the brunt of legal consequences, the senior officers often evade accountability.

"Why should you take colossal sums of money deposited into your account without questioning your institution's accounting officer about its purpose?" he wondered.

Mr. Onying advised individuals to create a trail of evidence when coerced into corruption, such as ensuring transactions occur through bank facilities or recording voice notes detailing the recipient and amount involved.

"The big fish is always slippery, but such measures create evidence, even in courts of law. Moreover, it is public members and support staff like drivers or secretaries who can assist with lifestyle audits," he added.

Collusion within government, he noted, is pervasive and often only surfaces when agreements among corrupt parties break down. "It is only when people fail to agree that alarms are raised," he said.

## A Judge's stand against corruption

Justice Canon James Ogoola, the former Principal Judge of the High Court of Uganda and the event's guest speaker, shared a striking anecdote. During his mother-in-law's funeral, someone discreetly handed his wife two envelopes, one labeled 'Condolences' and the other 'Soda'.

Sensing foul play, he asked the registrar to summon the court on Monday, ensuring that the author of the envelope and media were present. He then shared the story of the envelopes and had their author validate the contents in full view. The next day, headlines proclaimed, "Judge Rejects Soda" and Justice Ogoola never faced another bribery attempt during his tenure.

"An award is not only a recognition of excellence but also an inspiration for others to pursue integrity and professionalism in their diverse occupations," he said. Justice Ogoola lamented that corruption has reached endemic levels, with many losing their sense of shame.

"The laws, institutions, and public outrage against corruption are present. So why does corruption persist? It is because the systems we have in place to combat it are not up to the job," he concluded.

## Recognising corruption-free workers

Dr Mary Munyagwa, Medical Superintendent at Bwera General Hospital and the overall winner among frontline workers, expressed her gratitude and surprise at being nominated and awarded.

"In my work, every act of corruption means a life is lost because someone is denied quality healthcare. This recognition is a reminder that our efforts are appreciated and an encouragement to continue the fight against corruption," she said.

Dr Munyagwa acknowledged the complexities of her work but emphasized the importance of maintaining principles and values. She noted that limited resources are often exacerbated by actions such as absenteeism, which wastes valuable time and resources.

"For example, if a medical worker is absent, junior staff lack guidance, leading to delayed patient reviews and diagnoses. This cascades into prolonged hospital stays and increased resource wastage," she explained.

She advocated for creating effective grievance-handling mechanisms, such as working through supervisors and managers, to address systemic issues constructively.

## CORRUPTION-FREE SOCIETY

The National Citizens Integrity Awards continue to shine a light on the efforts of individuals and organizations committed to integrity. By empowering citizens and recognizing excellence, these awards are a step toward a corruption-free Uganda.