

CORRUPTION AS THE BANE OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: This paper examined the problem of corruption as the bane of national development in Nigeria. The paper observes that corruption, which is both an ethical and socio-political problem has filtered into all the sectors of the country, even into the religious sphere. The paper aimed to show that a deeper analysis would reveal how endemic corruption is in the Nigerian system and how this has been the bane of the country's pursuit of national development. This analysis would show the depth of the erosion of the Nigerian system by corruption and how this has negatively affected national development. Drawing from context analysis and textual investigation, the paper concludes that corruption is not only the bane of Nigeria socioeconomic development, it is also a cankerworm that threatens the existence of Nigeria as a political entity. It is therefore imperative that all hands must be on deck in the anti-corrupt struggle.

Keywords: Corruption, Anti-corruption, National Development, Socioeconomic Development, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, as a country has since independence, been committed to the challenge of national development. This commitment has manifested in the design of several national development plans and the formulation of several policies aimed at steering the country to the desired development. These development plans and policies, on paper, were at each point in time, widely acclaimed to be the answer to the problems that national development pose to the country. However, all through these years and having applied all these plans and policies at one time or the other, the country still has not been able to achieve the development that is sought. In fact, based on current observations, it seems to be the case that the country is making progress negatively. Discussions have identified corruption as a major impediment towards the achievement of the country's national development goals.

Corruption is an ethical and socio-political problem that varies from place to place, time to time and culture to culture. It is a global phenomenon that affects developed, developing and underdeveloped nations of the world (Aluko, 2008). It has caused lots of problems and occurs at all levels of governance local, state and federal. It has filtered into all the sectors of the country, even into the religious sphere. Corruption has been variedly defined by scholars and agencies. Guillermo (2018) defines corruption as anti-social behaviour which entails awarding improper privileges to oneself or cronies contrary to legal and moral norms and which impairs

the capacity of the government to secure the welfare of all citizens. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2000) defines corruption as the abuse of authority or trust for private benefit; and is a temptation indulged in not only by public officials but also by those in positions of trust or authority in both private enterprises and nonprofit organization. According to the ICPC Act, section 2, it sees corruption is the abuse of power, position or trust for personal or group benefit (Monetary or otherwise).

The problem of corruption is really endemic in Nigeria. Okoye (2012) writes that in 2012, Nigeria was estimated to have lost over \$400 billion to corruption since its independence. Ijewereme, (2015) agrees when stating that Nigeria has lost the fortune which would have driven her to development through corruption. According to Transparency International (2022), in the 2021 global corruption index, Nigeria ranked 154th in the 180 countries listed. In that particular index, South Sudan, at 180th, was rated the most corrupt in the world while Denmark was the least. A deeper analysis would reveal how endemic corruption is in the Nigerian system and how this has been the bane of the country's pursuit of national development. This paper is an attempt to evaluate the depth of the erosion of the Nigerian system by corruption and how this has negatively affected national development.

Corruption: A Historical Perspective

The origins of corruption could be said to date back to antiquity. Having defined corruption according to Guillermo (2018) as anti-social behaviour that entails according oneself improper privileges to the detriment of the collective good, it therefore means that since the dating of human social or communal interactions, there has been the prevalence of corrupt practices. This is also ascribable to human nature which is basically selfish and built on the principle of survival of the fittest. Following scholars like John Locke who maintained that it was because of certain miscarriages of justice that necessitated the formation of the civil state (Locke 1987), it would not be out of place to argue that those miscarriages of justice constitute corrupt practices, and therefore, it was because of corruption in the state of nature that necessitate the formation of civil authority.

All throughout the political history of Africa, administrative corruption which was alien has now become rampant. Pre-colonial Africa was founded on strong ethical values sometimes packaged in spiritual terms but with the end result of ensuring social justice and compliance (International Monetary Fund, 2000). However, with the advent of colonialism, systemic corruption became introduced on a grand scale across much of sub-Saharan Africa. The repudiation of indigenous values, standards, checks and balances and the pretension of superimposing Western cultures/structures destabilized the bureaucratic machinery previously in existence across pre-colonial Africa (Okoye 2012). The result is what is rampant across Africa today - conspicuous consumption, absence of loyalty to the state, oppressive and corrupt state institutions and others.

Colonialism contributed to the prevalence of corruption across sub-Saharan Africa in several ways. The British Indirect Rule system turned leadership in Africa into a corrupted enterprise where instead of holding power in trust for people, the rulers held power in trust for the colonial

authorities. The government became an antagonistic platform for forcefully extracting obedience from the people. In some instances, the dregs of the society, those who had no genuine personal achievement and thus had no high standing in the society became promoted as warrant chiefs by British authorities. Individuals without character who demanded money in exchange for manipulating colonial matters enthroned corruption at the highest rank of governance. To avoid being punished for crimes they committed, they resorted to bribery and other inducements (Ijewereme, 2015).

A key motive of the Indirect Rule system was to enable the colonial authorities to be able to collect taxes. With little or no knowledge of the economic earnings of potential taxpayers, colonial masters imposed flat-rate taxes known as hut tax on the colonies. This mode of tax payment was often steeped in violence whereby district commissioners or warrant chiefs were empowered to arrest any defaulter. The hut tax was mainly used in paying salaries and emoluments for colonial officers and in running the colonial office. There were very few benefits the people would see in the form of social service in return for the taxes they paid (Ijewereme, 2015). The result was the evolution of a latently corrupt system devoid of accountability and which pitched citizens against themselves and against the ruling class.

Corruption then infiltrated the law enforcement agencies. The history of police and military formation in several parts of the world can be traced to the need to protect citizens and ensure territorial integrity. Conversely, in the case of Africa, the police and military were established primarily to crush civilian opposition to colonial rule. Police engagement with the populace was founded on the need to enforce hateful and debilitating colonial laws, including forced taxation, segregation and quelling of anti-colonial uprising, at the end of colonialism, the newly independent African government inherited institution that had internalized a culture of citizen oppression and extortion. The immediate post-colonial police service and military were designed to inflict terror on innocent citizens and the citizens had internalized the art of buying their way off unwarranted harassment. This increased the prevalence of corruption among the rank and file of the forces (Ijewereme, 2015).

The major challenge for the immediate post-colonial African leadership was how to embark on massive re-orientation exercises. This challenge was not taken seriously by successive administrations in many countries of the continent. Even in cases where the need was recognized, the will and resources that could bring about the internally generated transition were lacking. Instead, emerging politicians saw it as a means of subverting the political and institutional processes in order to win or retain power. This accounts for why corruption has eaten deep into the national fabric of most African countries including Nigeria.

Corruption in Nigeria is deep in almost every sector of the country, be it political, religious, social and economic. Pre-colonial Africa was known for its emphasis on strong moral values, hard work and the celebration of individual achievement. Colonialism destabilized the prevailing pre-colonial system and uprooted men from the farms to work for the Whiteman as houseboys, miners, clerks and other menial jobs. The monetization occasioned by this exercise introduced a form of greed unknown in the culture of most pre-colonial African communities. More so, the prevailing obsession with items of alien tastes in a culture of consumerism rather

than production and the oppression of the less privileged are the natural outcomes of inherited corruption. Colonialism made Africans enchanted by the life of the Whiteman and hence, idolised the usurpers and people who gravely exploited their land and environment.

Causes of Corruption

Corruption results from a miscarriage of justice in the society. There are lots of factors that can cause corruption in the society. People do not indulge in corrupt practices because they like doing so, it is often the only option, in particular where the system is already eroded. To an extent, causes of corruption vary from place to place and a few are here identified:

Poverty: Poverty not only encourages corruption, but corrupt public institutions in turn exacerbate poverty in order to continue to subvert the system. Poverty and hunger are now instruments used by individuals in positions of authority to control the masses. When people are poor and hungry, they become gullible and therefore susceptible to further exploitation. For instance, if the system is working perfectly well and political leaders are able to deliver on their mandate of providing wellbeing for the citizens, people will be empowered to make independent and unbiased judgements. However, when the people are pushed to a corner because of want of basic needs, their psyche becomes attuned only to survival and in that condition, they can be manipulated without limit. This is one of the major causes of corruption and its endemic nature (Senior, 2006).

Also, the poor engage in corrupt practices out of desperation, but the only people who benefit in the long run are those already in power. It is no coincidence that the most corrupt countries often have the poorest citizens or are otherwise ravished by war and violence. 80% of Africans live on less than \$2 a day. In 2010, the United Nations (UN). Estimated that 239 million people in sub-Saharan Africa were undernourished (International Monetary Fund 2000). When the poor do not have what they will eat, they are forced to make money through cut-corners which are corrupt. The countries at the bottom of the corruption rankings, mostly in northern Europe, are among the wealthiest in the world. While it is difficult to say whether poverty causes corruption or corruption causes poverty, there is no question that the two are linked.

Illiteracy and Poor Education: Similar to poverty is the effect of illiteracy and poor education. It is not an unfounded coincidence that the most corrupt countries are often those with low rates of adult literacy. Education empowers a person to become a better citizen. The person who is a better citizen is one who has made the required effort to develop himself or herself. This development comes mainly from getting the right education which builds self-confidence because the individual cannot only be able to provide for oneself but contribute meaningfully to resolving the challenge of national development. However, when the individual does not have the right education, he loses in the bid to achieve personal development and thus becomes vulnerable to the exploitation by both the corrupt system and the corrupt leaders.

Literacy and the right education can prevent corruption in a number of ways. With the right education, the individual is always able to critically evaluate their own public institutions and politicians. Basic education makes people more likely to find stable, career jobs and therefore

they are less desperate. Again, while it is hard to say whether illiteracy causes corruption, or whether literacy can stop corruption, when people are aware and have the required level of political consciousness, they can hold their leaders accountable. When the people are able to hold their leaders accountable, corruption will be minimal if not eliminated entirely.

Unemployment: Unemployment or insufficient employment opportunities are a major inducement for corruption. Similar to education and literacy, the unemployed are more likely to succumb to illegal ways of making money out of desperation. Many Internet scammers and other grafters engage in this type of activity because they lack the opportunity to make legitimate gains. How do the countries with the highest rates of unemployment fare on the corruption scale? A clear example is Nigeria, where the country has been in the first five of the most corrupt countries in the world (Transparency International, 2022).

Desperation for Political Office: In Nigeria, political office has become the easiest means of gaining access to enormous wealth within a short space of time. Once an individual goes into a political office, the one now gains access to enormous wealth because of the highly eroded system that is in place. This access to unguarded public funds and the need to continue to build on the acquired wealth in order to prepare for future political battles now leads politicians into desperation to win public office. This is double-edged here. The corrupt systems feed the politicians with unaccounted wealth and the politicians continue to erode the system to keep open the channel of unaccounted wealth.

The Absence of a Strong Sense of Nationalism: In Nigeria, for instance, the nationalistic spirit is greatly waning. Citizens are no longer committed to national ideals but are now more concerned with selfish and narrow interests which most often run averse to the national interest. A *prima facie* assessment of Nigerian society gives a picture of a horde of wild animals pillaging and devouring the carcass of a prey that has just been killed by the group. It is like a case of everyone trying very hard to draw as much as one can get for oneself. If the individual is not fighting for himself, he is fighting for his ethnic group, religious denomination, group of friends or cronies, or political party. Nobody seems to care about the common good any longer. This why a lot of people think that the road to achieving sustainable national development in Nigeria is still too far.

The brazen display of wealth by public officials who are unable to explain the source, points to how bad corruption has eroded the society. Many of these officials lived on modest income before being elected or appointed into political offices. However, with their appointment to such offices, they become larger than life. The benefit from corruption and also continue to promote corruption so that the sources of ill-gotten wealth will remain open to them.

Glorification and Approbation of Ill-gotten Wealth by the Public: Many people in the society, even in the churches today do not care anymore about how people acquire their wealth. Instead, they worship and shower praises on known crooks who make heavy donations to them and ridicule the honest but rich who cannot afford to spray and make heavy donations with their hard-earned money. This now goes to show that hard work is not recognized and adequately rewarded. Today, in Nigeria, wealth is almost worshipped, such that the trouble

with Nigeria is not that the capabilities are inadequate, rather it is that the priorities driven by their values are wrong (Minto & Trincanato, 2022). With the zeal to get rich quickly, some individuals get into dubious activities and immoral actions like rituals which have become the order of the day.

These and more are some of the causes of corruption. A good appraisal of these factors will show that most of them feed on the fabrics of the nation and so have become endemic. It was Nuhu Ribadu who once said that “when you fight corruption, corruption fights back” (Messick, 2021) Corruption is so endemic in the Nigerian system that it is proving near impossible to eradicate. The irony is that without eradicating corruption in the Nigerian system, it would be very difficult for the country to witness any form of sustainable national development.

Corruption and Nigeria’s Quest for National Development

The origin of corruption in Nigeria dates back to its earliest history, especially between 1903 and 1966 (Aluko 2008). Various allegations of election fraud and corruption in the later part of the first republic which was the reason for the intervention of the military in the country’s body politics and the collapse of the Balewa administration in 1966. Despite the anti-corruption posture of the various military interventionist regimes from 1966-1967, they were also caught in the web of corruption. The oil boom arising from the sudden upsurge in the foreign revenue from petroleum products exports fuelled the growth of corruption under the various military administrations (Aluko, 2008).

During the Gowon Regime, contracts were awarded and payments were made upfront while concrete efforts were not made to supervise or monitor such projects. It turned out that most of the contracts for which complete payments had been made were not executed. When General Murtala came to power in 1976, he set up an assets investigation panel to examine the assets of all the former military governors, the administrator of the defunct East Central States and the federal commissioners in reaction to the numerous allegations of impropriety levelled against them. This investigation did not yield much result as only some of those individuals investigated were arrested and detained briefly and released to be later used by the military leaders to perpetrate their own corrupt dealings (Ijewereme, 2015).

During the Second Republic, that is 1976-1983, under the leadership of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the first executive president of Nigeria, there were various allegations of financially corrupt practices levelled against the government and its agents by the military government that overthrew it in December 1983. The Shagari government was termed so corrupt that it was described as *contractocracy* regime, that is to say, a government of contractors, by contractors and for contractors, all bonded together by the logic of fraud and corruption (Falola and Heaton 2008).

The administration was however tagged inept and corrupt. In addition, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu described Shagari’s regime as characterized by gross financial indiscipline and profligacy, wanton waste, political thuggery, disrespect for the rule of law and bare-faced free-for-all looting of the public funds through white elephant’s project (Ubi, Eko and Ndem 2012). Then,

Major Gen. Buhari became the new Head of State in 1984, his government established special military tribunals under Decree 3 of 1984 which was called the Recovery of Public Property Decree and other probing agencies to investigate public functionaries that served in the Shagari's administration. The probe panel under the leadership of Justices Sam Uwaifo and Muhammed Bello tried and found at least about 65 public officers who amassed illegal wealth in various (Ubi, Eko & Ndem 2012). The administration of Buhari/Idgagbon was the first in the country to provide stiff penalties for all public officers through the giving of long prison sentences from 21 and above and as well introduced social policy and control measures., for example, the war against indiscipline.

The regime of Gen Ibrahim Babangida, was credited with the dubious achievement, of democratizing corruption in Nigeria. According to Akinola, the Babangida's government encouraged official peculation, warning military officers being appointed by him as state governors. The regime will always be remembered for its high rate of corrupt practices and mismanagement and misappropriation of the abundant wealth of the country (Ubi, Eko & Ndem 2012).

From the ongoing, it is evident that the history of Nigeria's quest for sustainable development has been a history of struggle against corruption. When public officers who are put in trust of public funds and resources amass same for their personal, selfish and parochial interests to the detriment of the common good, then the country cannot make progress in her pursuit of development. Despite all the efforts at combating corruption in Nigeria, it keeps getting deeper into the fabric of the nation. And yet, no kind of national development can be achieved with the level of corruption in the Nigerian system.

Conclusion

corruption is not only the bane of Nigeria's socioeconomic development; it is also a cankerworm that threatens the existence of Nigeria as a political entity. It is therefore imperative that all hands must be on deck in the anti-corrupt struggle. In order to curb corruption, it is a submission of this paper, that the struggle should start from home by parents tutoring their children and impacting good morals, living exemplary lives as role models to their children and not folding their arms when things go wrong. Parents can no longer stand, watching their children derail from the part of morality to immorality with little or nothing being done.

At school, teachers who are bestowed with the task of taking care of the children and youths at school, impacting good morals academically and otherwise, should as well endeavour to see that the children kept in their custody are well taken care of academically and otherwise because they are seen as the second parents. They should make sure that the children in their care are well nurtured and punished when they go wrong because as the saying goes spare the rod and spoil the child but not to intimidate or molest them.

Also, in all offices, both public and private, individuals should struggle in order to avoid all corrupt practices by working hard to achieve success instead of seeking a fast means to success.

All the institutions established by the government to checkmate corruption should endeavour to see that corrupt practices by public or private individuals are punished and sanctioned effectively.

The nation's anti-corruption laws should be enforced to their fullest without fear or favour.

Also, improvements in socio-political and economic life should be improved. Job opportunities should be created because this will keep the minds of the youths busy and free from corruption. Workers' salaries should not only be paid as at when due, but the workers should be paid a living wage. That is, workers should be paid salaries that can sustain them and motivate them to shun corrupt practices. If these measures are put in place, together with a general reorientation of the Nigerian people, the country can begin to take the necessary steps towards socio-economic development.

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