

## **CORRUPTION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** This study investigates the impact of corruption on good governance in Nigeria using secondary sources of data through the analysis of key indicators derived from the fundamental components of good governance. By utilising secondary data sources, this study focuses on government legitimacy, public officials' accountability, and the government's capacity to formulate policies and provide services while upholding human rights and the rule of law. Despite the substantial resources allocated to policies promoting good governance, the study reveals that pervasive corruption remains a significant impediment, contributing to poor economic performance, deteriorating infrastructure, escalating living costs, and increased poverty in Nigeria. Addressing corruption is imperative for the nation's survival, presenting Nigerians with a clear choice: a sincere war against corruption or perpetuation of the status quo, risking consumption by this multifaceted challenge. The study concludes with recommendations to alleviate these issues.

**Keywords:** Civic Engagement, Corruption, Ethical Leadership, Rule of Law, Transparency

### **INTRODUCTION**

Corruption comes from the Greek word “corruptus”, meaning an aberration or a misnomer as defined by the Centre for Law Enforcement and education (CLEEN, 2010); corruption, according to Transparency International (TI), is the negative behaviour of public officials, either politicians or civil servants, whereby they enrich themselves or their cronies unlawfully, through the misuse of public power that has been entrusted to them (NG, 2022). Otite (2000) views corruption as the perversion of integrity, which could be presented in acts such as bribery, inordinate favour or moral depravity. This occurs when two or more parties interact to upturn the structure and processes of a society. It concerns the behaviour of functionaries that promote dishonest situations.

Corruption remains a pervasive challenge with far-reaching implications, impacting various facets of a nation's well-being. This study delves into the intricate relationship between corruption and environmental sustainability in Nigeria, seeking to understand the extent to which corruption hampers good governance and exacerbates environmental degradation. Corruption contributes to the development of environmentally damaging policies and practices and to the unfair allocation of environmental resources that contribute to environmentally harmful practices.

A growing body of research like that of Svetlana (2002), United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (2011), Stephen (2006), and Iheanachor et al. (2023) highlights the detrimental impact of corruption on environmental sustainability. Studies in diverse contexts showcase how corrupt practices weaken environmental governance, leading to increased pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and the depletion of natural resources. Nigeria, endowed which is endowed with abundant natural resources, faces a paradox where immense wealth coexists with widespread poverty and environmental degradation.

Despite the substantial resources allocated to policies promoting good governance, corruption continues to undermine progress. The impact of corruption on economic performance, infrastructure, living costs, and poverty is well-documented. These have affected Nigeria as a country by reducing the effectiveness of government spending and limiting provisions of public services, leading to inadequate and decaying infrastructure across sectors like electricity and the provision of portable drinking water, transportation, and telecommunications. However, its influence on environmental sustainability remains a critical but often overlooked dimension. Corruption has so permeated the Nigerian society that CLEEN (2010) declared that anyone who says that corruption in Nigeria has not yet become alarming is either a fool, a crook, or else does not live in this country. To buttress this fact, Transparency International made Nigeria one of the most corrupt countries in the world in terms of its corruption perception index for 1995 – 1997. In 1999, Nigeria scored as the second most corrupt nation in the world TI (2000). This study investigates the impact of corruption on environmental sustainability in Nigeria

### **Concept of environmental sustainability**

Environmental sustainability is the practice of interacting with the planet responsibly. We do so to avoid depleting natural resources and compromising the ability of future generation to meet their daily needs. It aims to improve the quality of human life without putting unnecessary strain on the Earth's supporting ecosystems United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP (2022). It is about creating an equilibrium between consumerist human culture and the living world. It involves making life choices that ensure an equal, if not better, way of life for future generations.

### **The effects of corruption on environmental sustainability**

As the global population grows and we begin to experience the long-term consequences of excessive energy use and industrial growth, we must prevent further damage to the WB (2022). It is our job to ensure that our future generations have healthy places to live and minimise our damage to the earth's biodiverse ecosystems. The combined effects of corruption on the environment are complex and depend on various factors, making it difficult to predict a clear outcome. Corruption weakens environmental regulations, leading to higher emissions and poorer environmental quality. Corrupt officials fail to enforce existing regulations, further worsening the situation. Deforestation decreases environmental sustainability due to illegal logging, timbering and smuggling of forest products (WWF, 2022). TI (2022) reports that corruption affects haze pollution via economic development. Therefore, Corruption weakens environmental protection directly and indirectly. corruption influences the dysfunctional environmental regulatory systems that lead to the overexploitation of natural resources and contribute to the extinction of species, the degradation and pollution of ecosystems and wildlife habitats and the spread of diseases and invasive species. Corruption creates socially sub-optimal and unbalanced environmental governance and violates extant rules (NEST, 2022). Ozturk and Al-Mulali (2015) examined the effect of controlling corruption on CO2 emissions

in Cambodia and revealed that controlling corruption can aid in reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The UNEP (2022) mentions the benefits of environmental sustainability as follows:

- i. We can protect ecosystems
- ii. We can continue to enjoy nature as it is
- iii. We can protect endangered species
- iv. Less pollution in cities results in better respiratory health for all
- v. This could halt or reverse the effects of global warming
- vi. We won't be creating enormous landfills all over the world that will take hundreds of years to break down.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study utilises secondary data sources, drawing on a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature, reports, and indices related to corruption, good governance, and environmental sustainability in Nigeria. By examining trends and correlations, we aim to shed light on the nuanced ways in which corruption affects the nation's environmental sustainability.

### *The Role of Corruption in Good Governance*

Government legitimacy is a cornerstone of good governance, yet corruption erodes public trust and confidence. The accountability of public officials is compromised because corruption fosters a culture of impunity TI (2022). The government's capacity to formulate effective policies is hindered, leading to inadequate environmental regulations and enforcement. Iheanachor et al. (2023) investigated how the governance system in Nigeria affects the growth-environment nexus by examining the effects of corruption on the economy and determining how robust economic performance affects the environment. Hence, corruption has negative and statistically significant effects on environmental quality and Nigeria's economic performance. This finding implies that economic performance responds to changes in corruption and carbon emissions in the long run in a negative and statistically significant manner. Think Africa (2012) argues that the political class has pushed Nigerians to a very high level of unemployment and a lack of social safety nets, which has left the electorates very poor and broken. Recently, the National Assembly discovered that fuel subsidy fraud caused Nigeria to experience a loss of \$6.8 billion in three years (NBS, 2020). However, most concerned Nigerians were taken aback when the fact-finding report suffered an irredeemable political suffocation on arrival.

### *Environmental Consequences of Corruption*

Corruption significantly contributes to environmental degradation in Nigeria. Illicit practices, such as illegal logging and oil theft, deprive the nation of its natural resources. Poor enforcement of environmental regulations exacerbates pollution, deforestation, and habitat loss (NEST, 2022). The diversion of funds meant for sustainable initiatives further crippled environmental conservation efforts. A study conducted by Iheanachor et al. (2023) revealed that corruption has negative and statistically significant effects on environmental quality and Nigeria's economic performance. Moreover, trade openness, energy consumption and gross fixed capital formation exerted a positive and statistically significant effect on economic performance. Interestingly, Yan and Wen (2020) demonstrated that corruption has direct and indirect effects on environmental quality and asserted that corruption increases CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and worsens the overall quality of the environment.

### *Economic Implications*

The economic fallout of corruption is closely intertwined with environmental sustainability. Poor economic performance resulting from corruption reduces the resources available for environmental protection. Additionally, corruption impedes investments in sustainable practices, hindering the transition to a greener economy. Sahli and Rejeb (2015) posited that a decline in economic performance can translate to a reduction in the level of pollutants emitted in an environment.

### *Escalating Living Costs and Poverty*

Corruption contributes to escalating living costs as embezzlement and bribery inflate the prices of essential goods and services. This economic strain disproportionately affects the vulnerable population, perpetuating a cycle of poverty that exacerbates environmental degradation as impoverished communities resort to unsustainable practices for survival.

### *The Urgency of Anti-Corruption Efforts*

Addressing corruption is imperative for Nigeria's survival and environmental sustainability. The nation faces a critical choice: a sincere war against corruption or perpetuation of the status quo, risking further consumption by this multifaceted challenge. Transparent governance, civic engagement, ethical leadership, and a robust rule of law are essential components of the anticorruption arsenal. Waziri (2009) opined that the system be subjected to the following four (4) accountability tests: i. The Fiscal Prudence Test. ii. Citizens' Accountability Test. iii. Public Integrity Test. iv. Public Morality Test.

## **Conclusion**

This study underscores the interconnectedness of corruption, good governance, and environmental sustainability in Nigeria. As the nation grapples with pressing challenges, a sincere and comprehensive anticorruption effort is not only a moral imperative but also an essential step toward securing a sustainable future. The choices made today will shape Nigeria's environmental legacy for generations to come.

## **Recommendations**

To alleviate the impact of corruption on environmental sustainability, we propose a multifaceted approach:

- i. **Enhanced Transparency:** Implement measures to enhance transparency in government operations, procurement, and resource allocation.
- ii. **Strengthen Civic Engagement:** Empower citizens through education and awareness programs, fostering active participation in demanding accountability.
- iii. **Promote Ethical Leadership:** Encourage and support leaders committed to ethical practices, integrity, and environmental stewardship.
- iv. **Enforce the Rule of Law:** Strengthen institutions responsible for enforcing environmental regulations and ensuring swift and impartial justice for offenders.

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