

# **CORRUPTION CRISIS AND ANTI-CORRUPTION WAR IN NIGERIA: PROBLEMS AND PANACEA**

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## **Abstract**

Corruption is a fast growing global predicament. In Nigeria, it has now become part of the mainstream culture with so much negative impacts that are greatly undermining developmental efforts in the country. For more than a decade, Nigeria has been categorized among the most corrupt nations of the world. This sad development prompted different Nigerian governments to establish some anti-corruption agencies like Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON), etc. The paper discusses the ugly phenomenon of corruption and anti-corruption war in Nigeria, some constraints against anti-corruption agencies such as government insincerity, poor funding/facilities, corruption within anti-corruption agencies, weak/corrupt judiciary, and poor public co-operation and so on. In view of these problems facing anti-corruption crusade in Nigeria, the paper advocates some sustainable measures for intensifying and winning the fight against corruption and they include, eradicating corruption within anti-corruption agencies, adequate funding/provision of facilities, increased public awareness/co-operation, entrenching of democratic governance, strengthening of judiciary and constitutional empowerment of anti-corruption agencies, etc.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Anti-Corruption, Panacea.

## **Introduction**

Nigeria was recently described by a social critic as a nation where the poor is getting poorer, the rich getting

richer, corruption getting stronger, EFCC getting weaker, politicians getting fatter, and the masses getting thinner. This state of the nation cannot

be disassociated from one major issue. The issue called corruption. Corruption in Nigeria appears to be a disturbing phenomenon that is very much on the increase despite the efforts made so far to check it. Majority of Nigerians tend to agree that corruption may be the biggest problem responsible for the state of the nation economically, socially, politically, culturally, infrastructurally and the tarnishing of our national image internationally, etc. Many Nigerians see corruption as a way of life, that is not good but they are helpless because they cannot really do without it. This is because of the sins of greed, dishonesty, selfishness, poverty and other societal circumstances. They fail to realize that the act of corruption itself propagates poverty and other social vices more than any other factor. Studies have shown that corruption retards economic growth and social growth and indeed aggravates poverty (Uzoечи *et al*, 2008).

Corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society to the extent that it is fast becoming an integral part of our mainstream culture. It pervades our life so completely today that one may be justified in calling it condition par excellence of contemporary Nigeria. On individual basis, Nigerians now acquire what can be referred to as "corrupt socialization", which inculcates into their minds all forms of social vices that are imbued with the spirit of corruption. For instance, many parents

in a bid to avoid visitors, ask their children to lie that they are not at home. This is dishonesty and tantamounts to corruption. Many Nigerians grow to believe that corruption is a practice that can be acceptable, justifiable, and inevitable, if one hopes to survive and succeed in the country or even elsewhere in the world. At the same time they still consider it somewhere in their mind as a bad practice. This is clearly ironical. In the same mind they conceive corrupt act, they also feel that corruption is bad. They blame corruption on fellow Nigerians, forgetting that they are also Nigerians themselves and that the fight against corruption should naturally start from individuals like them and then gradually move up to the institutions and the nation as a whole.

The paper discusses the predicament of corruption and its untold negative impacts in Nigeria, identifies some constraints affecting the anti-corruption crusade in Nigeria that have continued to militate against the operation of the anti-corruption agencies such as EFCC, ICPC, NAFDAC, Code of Conduct Bureau, NDLEA, NSCDC, etc. It argues that to succeed in the war against corruption requires the application of urgent and drastic steps that can revolutionize the fight in Nigeria and therefore submits a number of sustainable measures that can be put in place to empower anti-corruption agencies, governments (federal and states),

institutions and organizations, and the generality of Nigerians against the cancer worm of corruption and its attendant negative impacts.

The paper flows with the following subheadings:

- Corruption crisis in Nigeria: A back/forward look
- Past/current state of anti-corruption war in Nigeria
- Constraints against anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria
- Winning the anti-corruption war in Nigeria: urgent/sustainable measures
- Conclusion

### **Corruption Crisis in Nigeria: A Back/Forward Look**

The syndrome of corruption is not only thought of, heard of, discussed, seen, felt and acted in Nigeria but also has become institutionalized. There is hardly any day that passes without the discovery of new scandals and serious allegations of massive misappropriations do not appear in our print and electronic media (Iheagwam, 2008). Before discussing corruption crisis in Nigeria, lets grasp the meaning and implications of corruption. The word "corruption" is susceptible to varying definitions. It could connote moral deterioration; depravity; perversion of integrity, by bribery or favour. Corruption according to English

Oxford Dictionary is an inducement to wrong by bribery or other unlawful or improper means, a departure from what is pure and correct (Odiondiri *et al*, 2008). In the words of Lateef Adegbite;

*Corruption in its widest sense connotes the pervasion of anything from an original state of purity, a kind of infection or infected condition. It means acting or inducing an act with the intent of improperly securing an advantage for oneself or for another person.*

The prevalence of corruption in Nigeria is not debatable. Corruption is increasingly a negative phenomenon in Nigeria that is gaining momentum with every passing moment. There is no doubt that it is the bane of development in the country. An insight into the Nigerian state reveals that the anatomical structure of corruption is such that it pervades and permeates all levels and segments of the society (Odiondiri *et al*, 2008). A close look at the historical development of Nigeria indicates the continuous growth of corruption across different republics and governments in Nigeria. The First Republic that lasted between 1960-1965 was characterized by economic exploitation, social injustice and public authoritarianism (Amucheazi, 1999). The activities of politicians and political parties in the First Republic deepened political corruption by the acts of massive rigging, squandermania and electoral violence.

Having veiled themselves in parochialism, selfishness, greed, corruption, sectionalism and tribalism, they disrupted elections, hijacked electoral boxes, stole electoral materials and printed fake voting cards. It was during the First Republic, that the word "rigging" got into the political vocabulary of Nigeria politics (Chuta, S. C. 2004).

The Second Republic was not any better as corruption grew stronger and spread faster. Nkwocha (2008), states that, "corruption in high and low places pole-vaulted to Olympian heights in the Second Republic under the presidency of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, whose election victory at the polls were very controversial. The NPN-led government thrived seriously in corruption". The corruption index during this republic became so high that Okadigbo (1989), laments on the situation in this way:

*....The corrupt man is everywhere, the man on the street, the man next door, the man in the church or mosque, the man in the market or the department store, the policemen on beat patrol, the soldiers at the check point.*

The military governments of General Mohammedu Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida, Sani Abacha; the interim government of Ernest Shonekan and the military government of Abdulsalami Abubakar, were all bedeviled by the cankerworm of

bribery and corruption. Despite pretences, interventionist programmes and efforts against corruption by these governments, corruption continued to rear its ugly head in stronger ways in Nigeria. The state of corruption during these periods worsened with Abacha's unbeatable corrupt record in human history coupled with the financial recklessness of other military brigands like Babangida, Abdulsalami, etc (Nkwocha, 2008).

The Third Republic which actually came with the present democratic dispensation has over the past twelve years not only witnessed increased corruption but seems to have endorsed it by the actions of some government officials and politicians in Nigeria today. The situation in the country can best be described as corruption crisis. This is despite the establishment of numerous anti-corruption agencies to combat the growing trend of corruption in Nigeria. The prevailing circumstances in Nigeria in terms of corruption is disheartening, sad and possesses an omen of disaster for the nation in future. It has become a systemic problem, an institution of reckon and has grown to become the biggest and most lucrative endeavour in Nigeria's socio-economic and political environment. The overwhelming cases and evidences of tax evasion, tax scandal, bribery, pension scam, money laundry, gross level gratification, contract fraud and open looting of public fund, simply state the sad fact

that we have crisis of corruption in Nigeria. Udenwa (2012), summarizes the state of corruption in Nigeria with these words:-

*I can tell you that from independence till now, we have been corrupt, but the level of corruption today in the country is unprecedented. We have not had it as bad as it is today. Infact, there is corruption everywhere you go. It is regrettable. At times, I fear for the future of this country.*

### **Past/Current State of Anti-Corruption War in Nigeria**

It has been emphasized that corruption is our major problem in Nigeria presently. Corruption is enemy to national development and an uncompromising foe to many individuals' morality and spirituality. It is utterly negative phenomenon that is increasingly ravaging the modern world and under-developed climes like Nigeria more rapidly than can be imagined. Uzoechi et al (2008), claims that, "corruption is responsible for the instability of successive governments since the First Republic upto the present pretentious democracy being practiced in Nigeria. Every military coup has been in the name of stamping out the disease called corruption and every manifesto of a political party has always followed the same trend without actualization". Successive governments in Nigeria have ended up

worse than their predecessors in terms of their disposition to corruption. Nobody does anything for nothing. Nobody is left out; from the executive arm of government down to the legislature and to the judiciary; from the public to the private sector between men and women, boys and girls and even children, the story remains the same. People build a mind of corruption, conceive it, nurture it and work hard to sustain it. Corruption is everywhere from the richest to the poorest Nigerian (Ariole, 1992). This was Ariole's view of corruption in Nigeria as at 1992. This is no different from the view of Udenwa (2012) earlier stated in the paper.

It is obviously this condition of affairs in Nigeria in terms of corruption that led to the establishment of different anti-corruption agencies in the country by various governments. There was no significant effort against corruption recorded to have taken place in the First Republic, possibly because it was just beginning to surface at that time. The First Republic was like a period of incubation of corruption in Nigeria and so the act attracted little or no antagonism. By the Second Republic, corruption had developed "tap roots" into the fabrics of Nigerian society, to the level that was not only easily noticeable but a threat to her economy and development. Agbroko (2004), argues that, "in the Second Republic, the prevalence of ethical decay and indiscipline in the Nigerian social

milieu caused President Shehu Shagari to set up a Code of Conduct Bureau and ethical revolution respectively in 1981. It is on record that these efforts achieved little or nothing – as corruption became endemic with the military governments that came after Shagari's regime. Years before then, General Yakubu Gowon's government had instituted the public officers (investigation of assets) Decree No. 5 of 1966 which enforced the forfeiture of corrupt acquired assets (Chukwu, S. C. 2004). This singular act may be considered the first major move by a Nigerian government to fight corruption in the country. However, Gowon's anti-corruption strategies were not very effective because it provided a safe haven for corrupt politicians and military elites who sucked the nation's treasury dry due to opportunities provided by the oil boom era. With the coming of the Third Republic and the emergence of democratic rule in Nigeria by 1999, all hopes was that if we practice true democracy, issues and problems such as poverty, unemployment, infrastructural decay, crimes and particularly corruption will decline. This is apparently not the case today in Nigeria. Corruption has enveloped Nigeria in high measures. Various governments in Nigeria have established one form of anti-corruption agency or the other.

Today, we have Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt

Practices Commission (ICPC), Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON), National Food and Drug Administration Commission (NAFDAC), Code of Conduct Bureau, National Drug and Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), National Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), just to mention but a few. These agencies were set up to deal with the increasing corrupt practices in virtually all sectors of Nigeria's economy, governance, public administration and even in the private sector. They are expected to work against corruption alongside the conventional law enforcement organizations like the Nigerian Police, Nigerian Immigration Service, Nigerian Customs and Excise, Nigerian Prison Service, etc.

The anti-corruption war in Nigerian is perceived by many Nigerians as largely a failure as at now when compared with Nigerians expectation. Many people in Nigeria believe the EFCC, ICPC and SON, etc, have become corrupt themselves and therefore not fit to be considered as anti-corruption agencies. This is one of the serious issues facing these agencies. Nigerians see them as not only corrupt but also as structures used by governments' for intimidation, harassment and unlawful manipulations of individuals, organizations and institutions. The anti-corruption crusade in Nigeria remains unsuccessful when we remember the number of unresolved fraud cases, apparent insincerity on the

side of government and its lack of conformity to the rule of law and other democratic principles. A number of constraints remain clog in the wheel of effective anti-corruption drive in Nigeria and they are discussed below:

### **Constraints Against Anti-Corruption Agencies In Nigeria**

The constraints working against the anti-corruption efforts in Nigeria are numerous but we shall discuss some very prominent ones. They include the following:

- **Government Insincerity:** The idea of establishing anti-corruption agencies by government is a laudable and pragmatic one, but the apparent insincerity by some agents of Federal Government has continued to be an obstacle to the efficiency of the operation of anti-corruption agencies. Some politicians who are not in the good books of government are often on the EFCC's list of corrupt public-officers while some others who may be more corrupt are moving about freely, spending their ill-gotten wealth. Government must allow the anti-corruption agencies to function fairly, constructively and properly.
- **Poor Funding/Facilities:** Anti-corruption agencies such as EFCC, ICPC and SON etc, are organizations that require modern security gadgets and equipment that can aid interrogation, investigation and data collection, etc. They need

better facilities and adequate funding to be able to pursue the fight against corruption more efficiently. Part of the reasons for the corruption within these anti-corruption agencies is because they lack adequate funding and modern facilities that can empower them to refuse bribery and gratification that come from very corrupt/wealthy individuals and corporate organizations under investigation.

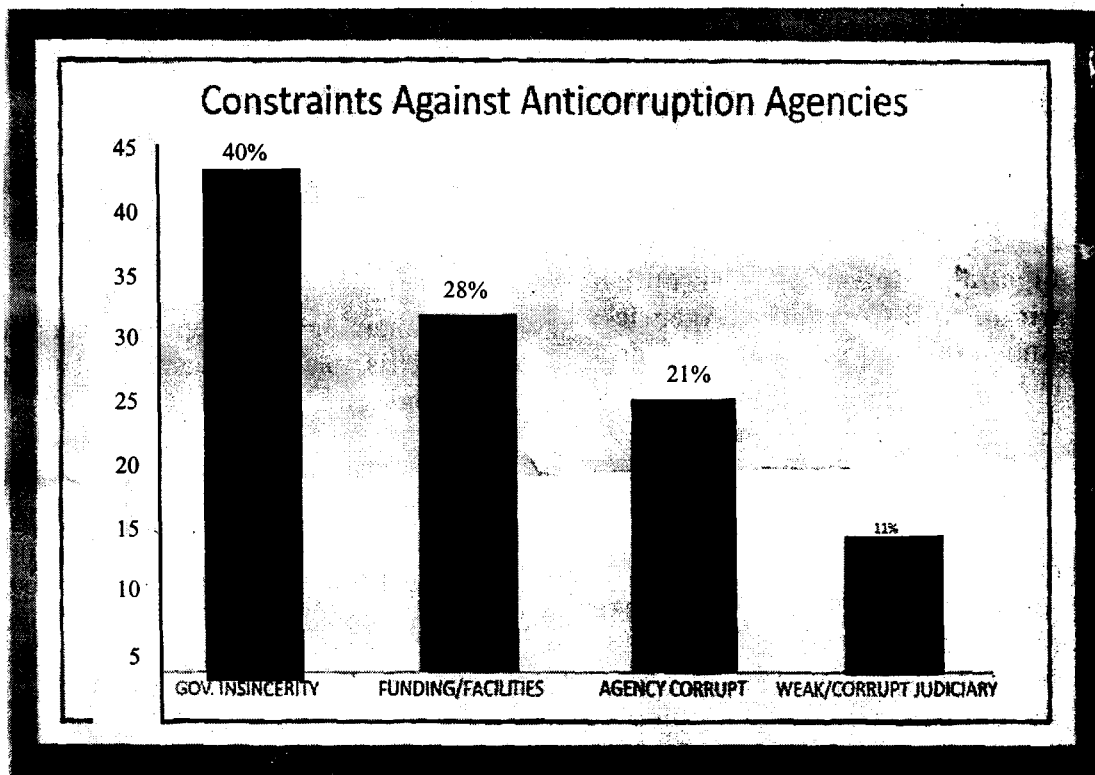
- **Agency Corrupt:** Internal corruption within the anti-corruption agencies is one sad development that may totally destroy the good vision of those who instituted them in the first place. The EFCC officials in particular have, at various times, been accused of collecting bribe running into millions of naira from corrupt politicians, public officers, bankers and firms. The SON and ICPC have also in the past, been associated with one scam or the other. These incidences of corruption within some anti-corruption agencies have continued to make the Nigerian public loose confidence in their fight against corruption.
- **Weak/Corrupt Judiciary:** The third arm of government (judiciary) remains a major apparatus for effective combating of corruption in Nigeria if only it can live upto expectations. The judiciary is bedeviled by too many problems that hamper its efforts against

corruption in Nigeria. Nigerian judiciary is weakened by internal rivalry, poor funding, dependence on the executive, slow discharge of cases, bribery and politicization of justice, etc. All these issues and problems have continued to undermine Nigerian judiciary in the fight against corruption.

➤ **Poor Public Co-operation:** Many Nigerians are still uneducated and do not really understand the tenets of human right, and therefore unaware of the fact that corruption

negates the principles of human right. Some Nigerians are so corrupt that they simply expect other people to be corrupt like them. This state of affairs create poor public co-operation with anti-corruption agencies. The Niger 11% public should be in the forefront of the war against corruption by working with anti-corruption agencies to reduce corruption in Nigeria. Below is a diagram showing some constraints against anti-corruption agencies and their level of impact in the country.

Source: Cleen Foundation's National Crime and Safety Survey, 2012. ([www.cleen.org](http://www.cleen.org)).





## Winning Anti-Corruption War In Nigeria: Some Urgent/Sustainable Measures

- **Adequate Constitutional Empowerment:** Many critics have referred to some of the anti-corruption agencies as “toothless bulldogs”, because they see them as lacking the necessary constitutional backings to execute their duties and functions efficiently without fear or favour. Anti-Graft agencies like EFCC and ICPC should be properly empowered constitutionally in order to be able to investigate and interrogate public officers to the logical end of the matter against them. These agencies cannot operate above what the constitution demands and so there is urgent need for constitutional reforms that can clearly give adequate power to these agencies.
- **Fighting Internal Corruption within Anti-Corruption Agencies:** Anti-corruption war is a war against unethical and immoral acts of dishonesty that undermine our collective effort towards development and nation building. It is a fight that its fighters must be morally justified to do so. The Anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria have been involved in series of scandals, bribery allegations, internal rivalry and infighting, official profligacy, that seem to make them look unfit to wage war against corrupt persons, groups and organizations.

The argument is that an immoral and corrupt organization should have no business fighting corruption because corruption fighting corruption only multiplies corruption and the nation continues to suffer. The anti-corruption agencies must develop an internal mechanism for purging itself of corruption in order to be in a better position to pursue their goals and objectives.

- **Entrenching Democratic Governance:** Democratic governance is governance based on the rule of law, conduct of free and fair elections, transparency, due process, social justice, etc, and can help to fight political corruption and install good leaders in Nigeria. Democratic principles are people-oriented norms and values that encourage people to think, behave and act in conformity with the rule of law which is central to maintaining a corrupt-free society. Nigeria is a democracy that its people are reluctant to imbibe the virtues of democratic governance and that is one of the reasons corruption is on the increase in the country. The government, religious organizations, civil society, professional bodies, traditional rulers and the private sector, etc, should encourage the inculcation of democratic norms and values in Nigerians whether on official or private endeavour.

➤ **Adequate Funding/Facilities:**

The poor economy of the nation coupled with internal corruption within the anti-corruption agencies have affected the operation of anti-corruption agencies negatively in the form of poor funding and lack of modern facilities. The government must consider the war against corruption as a "must win war", and therefore, through the budgets allocate more fund for procurement of modern facilities and gadgets for the intensification of the war. Corruption in Nigeria has become so sophisticated and organized and therefore efforts to stamp it out must be encouraged by adequate funding and provision of sophisticated facilities and equipment.

➤ **Increased Public Awareness/Cooperation:** Many Nigerians learn very fast when they are taught bad things or immoral acts. This is a sign of failure of proper value inculcation. There is urgent need to re-orientate Nigerians through the media, town-hall meetings, and other public awareness medium; and educate them on the full potentials and implications of corruption. To many Nigerians, especially the present generation, corruption is an act for those who are smart, clever and fit. To them, it is a game of survival of the fittest. What a wrong notion. Nigerians need to be taught that only values such as honesty, hardwork, patriotism, love, integrity and God-fearing, etc, that

guarantee the attainment of success and fulfillment, both as individuals and a nation.

➤ **Strengthening of Judiciary:**

Like many other institutions and organizations in Nigeria, the judiciary is weak, corrupt and somehow inefficient in the discharge of its functions. This has affected the application and enforcement of cardinal principles of democracy such as, rule of law, equity and fairness, observance of fundamental human rights, etc. Nigerian judiciary has of recent been bedeviled by bickering, infighting, allegations of bribery, perversion of justice and other forms of a failing system. The judiciary is not only the last place of hope for the common man but also for the nation in entirety. It must be strengthened to fight corruption in Nigeria by undergoing immediate reforms. Our leaders must conform to the rule of law, judges must abhor corruption and quick and fair dispensation of justice must be upheld.

### **Conclusion**

The paper believes that corruption is the biggest problem in Nigeria. It argues that corruption is the bane of development in the country and must be tackled in order to achieve any meaningful socio-economic and political transformation. The task of combating corruption falls mainly on the shoulders of anti-corruption agencies like EFCC, ICPC and SON,

etc. These agencies are presently facing some challenges that will require urgent/sustainable measures such as adequate funding, increased public awareness/co-operation, entrenching of democratic governance, self-purging of corruption in anti-corruption agencies and strengthening of judiciary, etc, to be able to deliver on their service.

Despite the endemic nature of corruption, Nigeria can still win the moral, spiritual, economic and political war against corruption if Nigerians as

individuals choose to have a thorough rethink about the ugly phenomenon of corruption and its untold negative implications and impacts on the nation. The result of such rethink may be a change of heart, attitude and behavior that will help many Nigerians to begin to appreciate the fact that a corrupt-free nation (or at least a nation with low rate of corruption) is a nation with the least problem to deal with and therefore a nation on the right path to speedy development and true nationhood.

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