

Corruption and the Problem of Development in Nigeria

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Abstract: The whole problem of development in Africa especially in Nigeria could be summed up in one word-Corruption. It has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society. This has earned her the second most corrupt nation in world. This study examines the issue of corruption and its attendant consequences to the Nigeria society. It takes a cursory look at the goal of the society against the background of the embarrassing level of corruption. The study however made some recommendations for combating this ugly monster.

Key words: Development problem, corruption, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria population as at 2001 stood at an estimated 125 million and by this occupies about one-quarter of the local population of sub-saharan Africa (National Planning Commission^[1]). With a land area of 924,768 square kilometers, ranging from the mangroves and wetlands of the southern part to the tropical rainforest and the savannah forest at the center and Northern region, respectively it has a lot to boast of in terms of natural resources.

Among these natural resources are, iron-ore, zinc, sulphur, petroleum, gold, natural gas, marble bitumen to mention a few. Many of these natural resources have yet to be tapped to full capacity due probably to our over dependence on crude oil. Our oil reserve alone is estimated at 32 billion barrels which is believed would last for close to forty years given the present rate of exploration of 2 million barrels per day; which ranked us as the sixth largest producer of oil at OPEC (National Planning Commission^[1]).

Our natural gas is also estimated at 174 trillion cubic feet; an equivalent of 30 billion barrels of oil. This again is expected to last for another 110 years at our present rate of exploration. About 20% of the total electricity being generated in the country was dependent on natural gas while our rivers generate the remaining 80%. Not less than 74 million hectares of land in the country is arable from which only about 40% is being utilized. Cocoa and rubber formed two of our non-merchandise export which could bail us out of economic doldrums if properly managed.

In terms of human resources, the country is equally richly blessed having produced teams of professionals in every field of human endeavour many of whom have migrated to other parts of the world especially, Saudi-Arabia, Europe and America in search of greener pastures. The labour force is continually being fuelled by our numerous tertiary institutions. Our over 60 universities,

on yearly basis turn-in thousands of graduates; employable or unemployable to the labour market.

It is rather unfortunate to note, given the abundant human and natural resources that the country ranked the 26th poorest country in the world. Our search lamp for this unfortunate omen points to an ugly monster which has posed serious threat to the stability and development of the nation. This of course has been confirmed by the international community as the singular social disease treading the over all development of the nation apart. The 1996 survey of corruption by the Transparency International (TI) in conjunction with Goettigen university ranked Nigeria as the most corrupt of fifty four (54) countries with Pakistan coming second. In 1998, Nigeria in another survey by the Transparency International (TI): Corruption Perception Index (CPI) ranked eighty one (81) out of eighty five (85) nations while it came second in 2001 next only to Bangladesh in get another survey of ninety-one (91) countries (Ogus^[2]).

It must be noted that corruption as a social ill is not synonymous with Nigeria alone. It is present in all nations of the world but with varying degrees and magnitude (Dike^[3]).

Corruption has been ubiquitous in complex societies from ancient Egypt, Israel, Rome and Greece down to the present....

It is also widely believed that this monster is also endemic in modern governments which excludes no continent, region or ethnic group. For example, government functionaries in France were accused of many sorts of criminal charges while in other advanced countries, the governments have colluded with bad leaders in developing countries to loot the treasury through fake companies. Edward Poulton^[4] article in the coment newsstudy reveals the United States corruption in Iraq to the tune of \$23 billion, yet the country continue to champion foreign assistance to developing nations of world. The center for Global Development Research

Fellow; David Roodman recorded United States development assistance to other countries as hitting a high record of \$27.5 billion in 2005 from \$19.7 billion in 2001. United States grants to Iraq tripled to more than \$10 billion while Africa also receive a boost of about half a billion dollar. (<http://llus.f317.mail.yahoo.com/yen/showletter//msgld>.) but while the imposed provisional government of Bremer's in Iraq went on spending spree of the nations money without given account, the government of president Bush only in a manner reminiscence of the Ostrich only awarded him a medal instead of seeking explanation. (Comet; May 22,^[5]).

The situation is worst in Africa where the leaders are mere agents of the super-powers to loot and enslave the people. Stevenson^[6] gave report of how corrupt officials embezzled loan money meant for development and stock-pile same in the creditors countries to the detriment of the people who are made to pay back this loans with their blood.

Nigeria is rich in terms of human resources majority of whom are professionally corrupt and exhibiting same in their respective institutions at all levels of government. Corruption as a social virus in Africa and indeed Nigeria poses no embarrassment to anybody but has come to be accepted as a necessary evil to contend with if the average Nigerian must survive.

Athonio Costa^[7] findings reveal that not less than five billion dollars (\$5b) has been lost to corrupt practices long before the signing of the anti-corruption bill in 2003. Another finding also revealed that the sub-saharan Africa within a period of seven years spanning 1995 through 2002 has received not less than \$114 billion dollars as grants with virtually nothing to show for it due to the gluttonous behaviours of our leaders (<http://www.globapolicy.org/nations/auder/general2004>).

This no doubt has informed some scholars like Edward Clay^[8] to advocate for the cancellation or suspension of aids to developing countries, an appeal which was supported by O'shea^[9] but with a little modification-that donor countries need take caution while granting aid to ensure that the people at the lowest rung of the ladder benefit from such gesture.

One primary aim of the millennium goal is the drastic reduction of poverty by the year 2015. For this to manifest, corruption at whatever level and whichever form it takes must be eradicated. This informed the popular outcry against it leading to the year 2003 world convention against corruption (Dike^[3]; Olufay^[10]).

With the world record of Nigeria in Corrupt practices, the present administration has been intensifying efforts aimed at combating it. Hence president Obasanjo in his inaugural address on assumption of duty in May 1999

made the total annihilation of corruption one of the priorities of his regime. Following the dictates of section 15 (5) of chapter two of the 1999 constitution which states: "the state shall abolish all corrupt practices and abuse of power", the government quickly sponsored the anti-corruption bill which was reluctantly passed by the national assembly in 2000 thus bringing to life the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). This was also followed by the setting up of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission in 2002 and re-enacted in 2004. These two agencies were to compliment the efforts of such anti-corruption agencies like the Nigeria Police, the Custom, Immigration, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), NAFDAC etc. (Oyewole, Olubunmi^[5]).

In spite of the numerous anti-corruption Corruption Commission, Nigeria position among the league of Corrupt nations remains very high. News of corrupt practices of government functionaries no longer attract headlines. No matter who is involved and the amount involved, nobody, blinks an eye. People, especially job seekers always target corrupt institutions like the Custom, Immigration, National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), Revenue offices and of recent, the Nigeria Police Force; which was adjudged alongside 'NEPA'; as the two most corrupt organizations in Nigeria for employment. The EFCC, the ICPC, code of Conduct Bureau, Public Complaint Commission, Judicial Commissions/Pannels of Enquiries all appear to be existing in names. The simple question is how far has the EFCC perform its role of fighting money laundering or the ICPC over embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds? Or how far has the Independent National Electoral Commission been able to fight electoral fraud in Nigeria?

A flashback to the operations of these agencies would only lead to the conclusion that the battle against corruption in the country for now is a forgone conclusion. If the above is taken therefore, how then do we measure development in a stinking nation such as Nigeria? This is the task of this study. In other words this study examines the impact of corruption on the overall development of the Nigeria society. It is therefore pertinent at this juncture to address the forms and causes of corruption.

FORMS AND CAUSES

Given the definition of corruption as the "movement and concealment of money and in most cases doctoring of figures and falsification of documents", implies that it takes various forms. It could take the form of misappropriation of fund, embezzlement or theft of public

property, falsification of electoral or population figures etc. The above mostly takes place in bureaucratic organizations and they refer to what Dike^[3] described as “low and street level corruption” rampart in institutions like licensing offices, police, hospitals, local government authorities, government parastatals and ministry, schools etc. (Leesday^[11] and Odekunle^[12]).

Another form of corruption involves the exhibition of greed among political leaders as it relates to taking political decisions such as the location of local government headquarter, state capital or of Industry. Corruption which takes place among low cadre workers such as gatemen, or clerks who can often intercept ones file on the way to cause delay usually involves tips of currency notes of small amounts, giving of gifts or promises of such is known as ‘petty corruption of Need’ (Dike^[3]).

The Nigerian society more than any institution should be blamed for the upsurge in corrupt practices. The weird value system of the Nigerian society which has as its main goal, ‘money’, is the catalyst for corrupt practices. Anybody who can acquire wealth no matter how the wealth is come about is a hero. Mediocrity is praised while hard study is jettisoned and achievement is only measured in terms of how much money one can parade at luncheon and not how he made his money. Such individuals are often awarded chieftaincy titles both in the church and his community. This tends to breed culture of greed among individuals who often throw morality into the winds.

Arising from the above is the dominant influence of the consanguine family system. The homogeneity nature of the society which makes everybody their brothers keeper also breeds culture of corruption. The care and upbringing of the child is not left to the individual parent but the whole society. In some cases, the community has been found to sponsor the education of one of its members who in turn would be expected to reciprocate this kind gesture by taking care of as many as possible. Such high expectations are usually impossible to meet given ones meager income; hence he employs other corrupt means of graft to meet societal expectations.

Also stemming from above is the fact that the law enforcement agents are often incarcerated by the protective arm of the powerful money bags over culprits. Where such officer refuses to play ball, he/she stands the risk of either forfeiting his jobs or being killed. This often brings about the indifferent attitude of these law enforcement officers such as Judges and police, towards corrupt practices eating deep into the society.

Lack of motivational impetus for workers in the mist of plenty also breeds corrupt practices. Where those, on

whom sweat the nation relies for survival are poorly remunerated, culture of graft is bound to reign. This, coupled with the ways retirees are handled give a signal to the economically active population. In Nigeria, pensioners see themselves as old cargoes, used and dumped without a care of their future. Some of them have had to die of starvation while others have been reported collapsing on queue while waiting for pension. This sends a bad signal to the working population who may have to employ all forms of administrative chicanery to enrich themselves in preparation for retirement. The catalogue are many and listing all the causes would take more space than required in this article. It is for this reason that we turn to a discussion on the effects of corruption on development.

IMPACT OF CORRUPTION ON DEVELOPMENT

The on-going popularity of Nigeria at International arena as a medalist in the field of corruption, no doubt brings on the nation home and abroad, a negative conferment of status. Ever since Nigeria was fingered by the Transparency International (TI) as the second most corrupt nation in the world, attention has shifted to Nigerians both at home and abroad. Investors are weary of transacting business with Nigerians and thus spells doom for our economic development.

Sympathy of the big nations could no longer be sought as they are not willing either to loan or give aids to us. No wonder why it was advocated in some quarters that aid/grants in whatever form should be out rightly cancelled or suspended from Africa as it was discovered that the money granted often ends up in a few corrupt hands. Where it is granted, it often comes with tough lending conditionalities to the detriment of the common man. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are often found of dictating what to do with the money to us thereby infringing on our sovereignty as a nation. Quite often, these super nations dictates the pace and the activities of leaders in those countries. The government of such a dependent nation becomes a mere stooge or rubber stamp.

Money meant for viable projects such as health, education, industrial development are often diverted by corrupt officials thereby impoverishing the people. Thus as Costello (2001) rightly argued;

“Nigeria as a country has enough money to tackle its poverty challenges if government can win this battle against corruption and mismanagement the money will start to turn into functioning of schools, health services and water supply thus laying the foundation to eradicate poverty-(Dike^[3]).

Other writers who have supported the above include Costa-Anthony^[13] Olufayo^[1] correlating Corruption with poverty and income inequalities. Much time and energy are wasted deliberating on corruption, its evil effect and ways of eradicating it. In Nigeria, the huge amount spent on such agencies as 'EFCC' AND 'ICPC' could have been spent on education or road network in the country. In spite of the huge money being spent, there is simply nothing to show for it as we remain the 26th poorest nation in the world.

Corruption often leads to political instability in a country as every ethnic group often feels cheated in the way resources are being allocated. Every group wants to be at the corridor of power and this breeds antagonism, killing of political opponents and moves towards succession.

THE NIGERIAN ANTI-CORRUPTION WAR: AN ALTERNATIVE FORGONE?

The Obasanjo administration since inception in 1999 has shown its commitment to fighting corruption to a stand still in the country. So many anti-corruption bills have been passed by the national assemblies and very many anti-corruption agencies have been established. The police have equally been equipped while many more officers recruited into the force. Judging by the amount of money and energy exerted so far, one is not in doubt of the intention of the government to stamp-out corruption from our social fabric.

The operations of these agencies leaves much doubt as to the sincerity of the government in its anti-corruption crusade. The first chairman of the ICPC; Justice Mustapha Akanbi expresses his disgust at the way government is handling the war against corruption in the country. According to him, government is not showing enough political will to combat the scourge. The commission has grossly been under funded and this has crippled the activities of the commission. A budgetary allocation of N486 million yearly is too meager to handle the numerous cases before the commission.

Secondly, is the restricted power of the commission to prosecute many corrupt leaders in the country. The Jurisdictional power of the commission does not extend beyond the year of establishment of the commission in 2000. This in effect means that ex-leaders who looted the treasury and are brandishing it everywhere cannot be queried. This has labelled these corrupt leaders as sacred cows who are considered to be above the law in this country yet the president keeps on saying that there is no sacred cow in his government. He once even asked anybody to come out against any of these past

leaders. Shortly after this statement, the Okigbo's report (The News May^[14]) was published by the News magazine revealing the activities of very many of these past leaders and on this the president has kept mute till date.

It is disheartening to note that while the commission has not the jurisdictional power to prosecute these leaders, the police which has been fingered as one of the most corrupt institutions in the country was given the power to do same. Of recent the Inspector – General of police; Mr. Adewusi was arrested and tried of corruptly enriching himself while in power. (Vanguard June 17,^[15]).

The above explains why the ICPC in its first four years of existence could not convict any of the 34 cases of corruption before it. (Guardian June 17,^[16]). Cases of allegation of corruption against state executives cannot be prosecuted fully because of what is known as the immunity clause in the constitution. This has generally shielded many of them from the hands of the law for as long as they remain in power. Justice Akanbi reported of the case of corrupt practices which he was to try against some state governors but which was challenged by the then Bayelsa state chief executive which delayed speedy trials for close to three years. The same governor was later arrested and jumped bail in Britain (Vanguard June 17,^[15]). For as long as the issue of immunity remains in the constitution the war against corruption could only be seen as a wild goose chase.

Another problem has to do with the lack of effective monitoring of business transaction in Nigeria. Foreign companies have been found to have colluded with government officials to loot the nation of several thousands of money meant for development in terms of inflated contracts awards.

Then comes the problem of transparency on the part of the government. The federal government should lay a good example by being accountable to the people before accusing others such as governors and other government functionaries. It would not be until the government removes, like the biblical injunction the speck in its own eye that it could be taken seriously as capable of removing the speck in others eyes.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

The negative effect of corruption on a nations development is enormous. "Corruption as a scourge hinders development and poses threats to Democracy". Eradicating this ugly monster is a task that must be done and urgently too.

One good way of doing this is to exhibit transparency in governance. The federal government is doing well by publishing allocations given to state government and

other parastatals but it should do same for itself so that tax payers would know how their money is being spent.

Secondly, it is recommended that the various commissions such as the ICPC and the EFCC be well funded to be able to operate effectively. The Issue of limited Jurisdictional power of these bodies needs be revisited such as to give it almost unlimited power to prosecute anybody on whom an accusing finger is being pointed. The commission should however be controlled by the appellate and the supreme courts. It is also necessary to ask all appointee of government to declare assets on appointment so as to monitor them while in power. Anybody suspected to be living above his/her legitimate income should be made to give a public account of his wealth.

The issue of corruption should be taken as a security threat to the nation, hence ethical values should be revisited. It is suggested that it should form part of the curriculum of both primary and secondary schools.

The much talk on both local and International Radio and Television without action being taken should be stopped. Such official window dressing of corruption only make us comparable to the signpost pointing to the direction it never goes.

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