

THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN ECONOMY: A FLIRTING ILLUSSION

Ali D. Ibrahim

Department of Business Education
Federal College of Education, Yola
Email: alidanje@yahoo.com

Abstract: *Corruption is a multifaceted public, political and economic phenomenon that affects all countries. Corruption undermines democratic institutions, slows economic development and contributes to governmental instability. Corruption attacks the foundation of democratic institutions by distorting electoral processes, perverting the rule of law and creating bureaucratic quagmires whose only reason for existing is the soliciting of bribes. This paper chooses to focus on the forms causes of corruption universally and domestically, and efforts of government in curbing corruptions. The paper recommends Morality, Pension Reform, Having the right weapons- policies, laws, and resources, Independent and incorruptible enforcers, Confiscation of assets and Reduction in the opportunities among others as a means of reducing the level of corruption in Nigeria. It was concluded that until that day when the fight will know no tribe, party, friends and allies, it shall remain a flirting illusion to be pursued.*

Key words: Corruption, The fight against Corruption, Pension Reform and political will

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Ali D. Ibrahim (2017), The Fight against Corruption in Nigerian Economy: A Flirting Illusion. *J. of Social Sciences and Public Policy*, Vol. 9, Number 1, Pp. 109-121.

INTRODUCTION

Today fighting corruption has emerged as one of the most important challenges facing countries around the world. While economic development for eliminating poverty was the top priority in the past, rooting out corruption has become a prerequisite for joining the ranks of advanced

nations. Since the return of democracy in 1999, Nigeria government has taken some steps to address the twin problems of corruption and bad governance in the country. These measures include public service reform (monetization to reduce waste and reduction of over bloated personnel, reform of public procurement); establishment of Anti-corruption Enforcement agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt and other Practices Commission (ICPC)); the Due Process, and the sanitization of the financial services sector by the Central Bank under Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, which has revealed mind boggling levels of bare faced theft by the management of several banks in Nigeria. Despite the successes achieved by these measures, the situation remains unacceptable as corruption continues to permeate and pervade every facet of national life in Nigeria. What is more worrying is that in spite of popular anger against corruption and bad governance, which have robbed the collective well being of the people of Nigeria, there remains a lack of national consensus on repulsion against the perpetrators (irrespective of their ethnicity, religion, class and gender) and emergence of a popular movement that is capable of galvanizing the palpable rage of the people and channel it to series of actions and outcomes that challenge the status quo (dike, 2005). Corruption is both one of the long-standing problems and the most disheartening challenges facing human society particularly Nigeria. The origin of the word 'corruption' means an agent (public official) abuses his/her position and authority for his/her private interests without the knowledge of a master and ultimately leads to destruction. Etymologically, the word "corruption" comes from the Greek word "corruptus" meaning an aberration or we may say a misnomer (Waziri 2010). The United Nations Global Programme against Corruption (GPAC, 2001) defines it as "an abuse of (public) power for private gain that hampers the public interest. Transparency International has chosen a clear and focused definition of the term as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gain". It can also be defined simply as a perversion or change from the general accepted rules or laws for selfish gain.

Corruption is an endemic social and moral decadence that has universal presence. It has in the Nigerian situation reached an alarming proportion as a result of its widespread pervasiveness. It has assumed notoriety as a societal canker worm during the military regime hence the words of Achebe (1983,

pp337-38) "My frank and honest opinion is that anybody who can say that corruption in Nigeria has not yet become alarming is either a fool, a crook or else does not live in this country.' He further added that 'Keeping an average Nigerian from being corrupt is like keeping a goat from eating yam.' Olayinka in his Publication (2012), said that Chinua Achebe in 1984 observes that: "Corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage and Nigeria will die if we keep pretending that she is only slightly indisposed.

This was twenty nine years ago. How would you describe corruption situation today?

Forms of corruption

Corruption is known by various appellations as settlement, kickbacks, inducement, mismanagement misappropriation etc. What ever it has been branded, Corruption could be generally grouped under the following if one wants to take a holistic approach of it. These are Political Corruption (grand); Bureaucratic Corruption (petty); and Electoral Corruption (GPAC, 2001. dike, 2005).

Political corruption occurs at the highest levels of political authority. It happens when the politicians and political decision-makers, who are entitled to formulate, establish and implement the laws in the name of the people, are themselves corrupt. It also takes place when policy formulation and legislation is tailored to benefit politicians and legislators. Political corruption is sometimes seen as similar to corruption of greed as it affects the manner in which decisions are made, as it manipulates political institutions, rules of procedure, and distorts the institutions of government.

Bureaucratic corruption occurs in the public administration or the implementation end of policies. This kind of corruption has been branded low level and street level. It is the kind of corruption the citizens encounter daily at places like the hospitals, schools, local licensing offices, police, taxing offices and on and on. Bureaucratic petty corruption, which is seen as similar to corruption of need, occurs when one obtains a business from the public sector through inappropriate procedure . By and large it involves the exchange of smaller amounts of money or minor favors by those seeking preferential treatment. It is sometimes referred to as 'administrative

corruption'. When both exist side by side in a single country, corruption becomes 'systemic' and highly damaging. This, regrettably, has been our lot since independence (Deborah, 2011)

Electoral Corruption includes purchase of votes with money, promises of office or special favors, coercion, intimidation, and interference with freedom of election [Nigeria is a good example where this practice is common. Votes are bought, people are killed or maimed in the name of election, losers end up as the winners in elections, and votes turn up in areas where votes were not cast]. Corruption in office involves sales of legislative votes, administrative, or judicial decision, or governmental appointment. Disguised payment in the form of gifts, legal fees, employment, favors to relatives, social influence, or any relationship that sacrifices the public interest and welfare, with or without the implied payment of money, is usually considered corrupt.

Corruption is called by the following names:

Bribe: The payment (in money or kind) that is taken or given in a corrupt relationship. These include kickbacks, gratuities, pay-off, sweeteners, greasing palms, etc.

Fraud: fraud is defined in law as intentional misrepresentation of material existing fact made by one person to another with knowledge of its falsity and for the purpose of inducing the other person to act, and upon which the other person relies with resulting injury or damage (simon 2012). It involves some kind of trickery, swindle and deceit, counterfeiting, racketing, smuggling and forgery.

Embezzlement: This is theft of public resources by public officials. It is when a local or state official steals from the public institution in which he/she is employed. In Nigeria the embezzlement of public funds is one of the most common ways of economic accumulation, perhaps, due to lack of strict regulatory systems.

Extortion: This is money and other resources extracted by the use of coercion, violence or threats to use force. It is often seen as extraction from below.

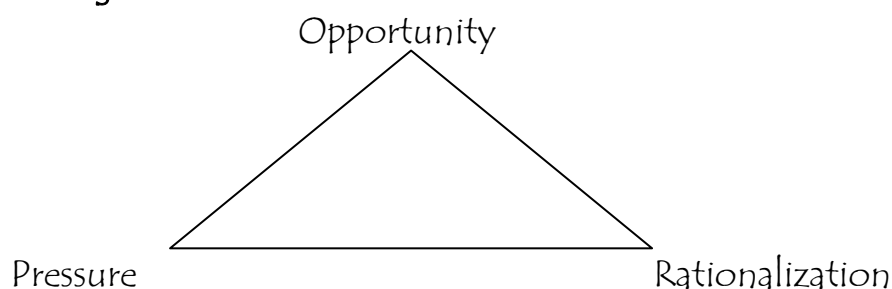
Favoritism: This is a mechanism of power abuse implying a highly biased distribution of state resources. However, this is seen as a natural human proclivity to favor friends, family and any body close and trusted.

Nepotism: This is a special form of favoritism in which an office holder prefers his/her kinfolk and family members. Nepotism, [which is also common in Nigeria], occurs when one is exempted from the application of certain laws or regulations or given undue preference in the allocation of scarce resources (Amundsen, 1997)

The Universal Causes of Corruption

The burgeoning corrupt practice in the country has been largely attributable to the approval of the practice by the Nigerian society. People who are corrupt or who outrightly steal public property or government money are welcome into the fold of the society as heroes/heroines or as those who have made it in their civil service career. The society does not condemn or abhor this abominable act. Hence it has given the perpetrators of the act the guts to fraudulently enrich themselves with impunity at the expense of the nation. The causes of corruption in generally are depicted by a triangle below.

Corruption Triangle



Source: Nicholas Cameron 2012

Opportunity:

- Poor controls
- Lack of segregation of duties
- Poor governance
- Abuse of authority

Pressure:

- Family pressure
- 'Results results results'

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- Maintaining status-life style.
- Illness
- Addiction—drinks, drugs, gambling.

Rationalization:

- They do not pay me enough
- Everyone else does it
- Who cares?
- I will never get caught
- Its only a small amount
- I'm in charge
- Rules are made to be broken

Causes of Corruption in Nigeria

Moral debauchery

Corruption has thrived in the Nigerian society because of the general moral decay and the craze for materialism in the country. Our moral and religious values have been jettisoned in the search for hedonism. The two major religious in the country have both condemned corruption in all its ramifications. However some adherents of the two religious it seems have not imbibed those religious and moral values that are against corrupt practices.

Attitude of Government and citizens towards Corrupt Officials

Another important cause of corruption in the country is the lukewarm attitude of government officials towards the corruption crusade. Past governments in the country have paid lip-service to the war against corruption since those who live in glasses houses will not throw stones. In other words, those in the vanguard of corruption are themselves corrupt contrary to the legal maxim which says if you are looking for equity you must come with clean hands. This attitude of government officials has aided its spread among public servants in the country. Commenting on this sad development, the former President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo says that;

"Most of those who can, with some respect and credibility, speak against the ills of the present have become victims of the practice that has come to be called "settlement". Choosing a moment when they

are most vulnerable, the government steps in with generous assistance, to fly them or their dependents abroad for life saving medical treatments, or famous of lifting oil or supply fertilizer". From this point on their silence is assured (Graybill & Thomson, 1998).

The citizens also compound the corruption tendencies in public office holders by celebrating them instead of castigating them.

Pay package

The pay package is supposed to cater for husband, wife, four children and parents (family wage). But, the civil servants in the Nigerian society are paid starvation wages instead of living wages. Most civil servants are given take-home pay which will not take them home and they therefore find it difficult to survive under the harsh economic realities of the country. For this reason civil servants are tempted to engage in corrupt practices such as receiving bribes to sign contract agreements, give employment to job seekers etc.

Tenureship

In addition to the unfortunate development above is the instability of civil service appointments especially those that have political bearing. Most policy makers are political appointees whose tenure terminates with the end of the incumbent administration. The transitory nature of these appointments makes it compelling for many to corruptly enrich themselves preparatory to the life of retirement which is more often than not very bleak for most civil servants.

The Extended Family System

The African society has placed a lot of burden on the shoulders of most civil servants who are the breadwinners of such families. This is because a man has obligations towards his immediate family, his parents, brothers, sisters, uncle's in-laws etc. Therefore, the higher one, ascends the social ladder in one's civil service career, the more one is expected to contribute to the upkeep of one's less fortunate relations and friends.

The Fear of Life after Retirement from Service

The manner in which senior citizens (retirees) are been treated encourages corruption. The situation where people retire and their benefit has no time, date, month or year to be paid, has left much to be desired. Civil servants are

tempted to go to any length to amass wealth as an antidote to the ugly scenario of working, waiting, and dying without benefit. It is disheartening seeing what our senior citizens pass through when it comes to the payment of the retirement benefits. Therefore, haven seen what senior citizen are passing through, those in service will want to prepare for safe landing (amassing wealth by hook or crook). In fact even the present system of compulsory pension scheme where retirees will only be given some fraction of his/her total savings by /at retirement has made matters worst.

The Trepidation of Penury

The fear of pennilessness has driven many people to engage in all kinds of corrupt practices. Many people are terrorized by poverty Therefore, when an opportunity presents itself many would go for it whether it is legitimate or otherwise. The economic problems of most 3rd world countries have encouraged the act of corruption in those countries. Most of the developed countries are now realizing the large-scale corruption prevalent in the developing countries because of their economic prosperity. Hence corruption in other words is a function of poverty.

Efforts of Government at Curbing Corruption

In talking about corruption, one must look at the problem alongside the role of governance and the government in curbing this menace. ". It is therefore worthy to list some of the efforts made by both past and present Nigerian Governments have efforts in trying to curb corruption in principles but within the government majority of our leaders are sabotaging the effort of the fight against this monster called corruption. Hence, the words of former *Attorney General and Minister of Justice* of Nigeria KanuAgabi, at a meeting with state commissioners of police,

"Some of our leaders are doing everything they can to make the work of the police impossible. Big men are the greatest criminals and except you go after the big criminals and bring them to book, the rate of crime may not reduce. But if you bring three or four of these big men to book, the rate of criminal activities would reduce. He declared, Arrest ministers, arrest the big people and others would fear (The Vanguard, 2002 in Dike, 2005)."

According to Transparency International August 25, 2011 "Nigeria's fight against corruption is not real because so many arrests have been made but it is not easy to count the prosecution'. However below are some of the efforts made by both past and present Nigerian Governments to curb corruption (Farida, 2010).

- The "Corrupt Practices Decree" of 1975 promulgated by the regime Of Murtala/Obasanjo.
- War against Indiscipline by Buhari/Idiagbon regime.
- Code of Conduct Bureau of 1990.
- Advance Fee Fraud & Other Related Offences Decree of 1995 by the Abacha regime which was later re-enacted as the Advance Fee Fraud and Other Related Offences Act, 2006 by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo administration.
- The Money Laundering Act, 2004
- The Economic & Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act, 2004.
- The Procurement Act, 2007. These have come alongside the establishment of Anti-Corruption agencies such as:
 - The Nigerian Extractive Industrial Transparency Initiative (NEITI)
 - The Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC)
 - The Technical Unit on Governance & Anti-Corruption Reforms (TUGAR)
 - The Economic & Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)
 - Budget monitoring and price intelligence unit (BMPIU) which later transformed into Bureau for Public Procurement.

With the above listed efforts, the questions are, are we really serious in fighting corruption? Are we matching laws/rhetoric's with action? Are these not diversionary strategies? The answer to the above was provided by former President (Obasanjo) where he told world leaders at the 100th International Labour Conference held in Geneva, Switzerland that the Federal Government lacks the political will to fight corruption. He described it as a cankerworm that has militated against the development of the economy. He also accused politicians of deploying proceeds of crude oil to fund their various political

ambitions (Linda 2011). These words are from a retired General, former Head of State, Former President, and former Chairman Board of Trustee of the then ruling Party (PDP). This leads us to another question why create agencies that can do nothing knowing fully well that the Federal Government lacks the will to fight corruption?

Implications to the Economy

There is no statistical tool yet created or developed to determine the extent of damage which corruption has done and is still doing to our dear nation-Nigeria. Although it is argued that there is positive aspect of corruption, any right thinking person in Nigeria where ubiquitous corruption has damaged the society will find it impossible to agree that corruption is beneficial, no matter how plausible it may be. However what is practical about corruption in Nigeria is that it hampers the efficiency of public services, undermines confidence in public institutions and increases the cost of public transactions which, in turn, is shouldered by taxpayers. This is especially critical in the situation of scarce resources that require a higher optimisation of public spending. Corruption cases generate a decline in confidence in public institutions which are fuelled by well-publicised scandals. Furthermore, corruption affects other sectors, and in the long run undermines trust in government. In specific terms, below are some of the dangers of corruption:

- Decay and collapse of Infrastructures- roads, housing and other social services.
- Decrease in standard of living
- Fall in standard of education
- Ethnicity and nepotism
- Slow movement of files in offices,

According to Dike (2008) even the mad people on the street recognize the havoc caused by corruption - the funds allocated for their welfare disappear into the thin air. Thus, the words of Former President Obasanjo in his inaugural speech at the Eagle Square in Abuja on 29th May, 1999, "Corruption is the greatest single bane of our society today" (BBC News, 1999). Consequently, this issue keeps reoccurring in every academic and informal discussion in Nigeria. And the issue will hardly go away because the war against corruption is only fought in a gathering like this.

lastly, the report of the political Bureau of 1987 has identified corruption as the bedrock of Nigeria's political failure. It is apt to quote the discourse of the political Bureau Report on the manifestations of corruption in the Nigerian society.

The report revealed that:

"manifestation (of this Cankerworm) include the inflation of government contracts in return for kickbacks, frauds and falsification of accounts in the public service, examination malpractices in our educational institutions including universities; taking of bribes and perversion of justice among the police, the judiciary and other organs for administering justice; and the various heinous crimes against the state in the business and industrial sectors of our economy, i.e collusion with multinational companies, such as over invoicing of goods, foreign exchange swindling, hoarding and smuggling."

Recommendation for Reducing the Degree of Corruption Nigeria

For effective control of corruption, the society must develop a culture of relative openness, in contrast to the current bureaucratic climate of secrecy. And a merit system (instead of the tribal bias, state of origin and nepotism or favoritism, which has ornamented the scenery) should be adopted in employment and distribution of national resources, etc. More importantly, the leadership must muster the political will to tackle the problem head-on. Thus, the following must be on sight in respect to control of Corruption.

- Morality
- Pension Reforms that will enable opening of Pension accounts with Commercial Banks and the 18% will flow in directly into the account and withdraw-able after retirement or death as the case maybe.
- Have the right weapons- policies, laws, resources
- Independent and incorruptible enforcers
- Punishment and accountability
- Reduce the opportunities
- Reduce the pressure on individuals
- Scrutiny for sources of income
- Confiscation of assets

If Nigeria really want to fight corruption then, she must acknowledge that, the war against corruption like terrorization is a special kind of war. It admits

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of no predictable methods. It is a war against human selfishness and greed. It is a war against rapid and senseless primitive capital accumulation. It is a war against decadence of mind, ethics and morals. Because of these special characteristics of the war, it requires a strong and inflexible political will. It must be approached holistically. Casual and superficial approaches will not work. Rhetoric must match concrete action. Like all wars on rescue and reinstatement, friends will be hurt; families and associates will equally be hurt. And above all, politics have no place in the war.

CONCLUSION

Based on the above, on till that day the war against corruption in Nigeria will remain but a flirting elusion.

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