
THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF CORRUPTION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper specifically examines with concrete examples via political economy approach, the concept of corruption and its repercussions on Nigeria and what is to be done in combating the increasing spread of its tumour to all stratas of the Nigerian socio-economic, political and cultural lives. In the process it was revealed that the lack of definitional unanimity on the concept has made its mere explanation the analytical goal rather than offering meaningful solutions to the problem it poses by way of its covert or overt institutionalization, to the growth of the Nigerian society. The paper advocates as part of the solutions to the quagmire, preliminary war of the mind by agents of socialization and a state and ruling class that preach and practice positive values.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has gained enormous notoriety as the most corrupt country in the world overtime. This miasma which has been like a cankerworm has eaten deep into the fabrics of our socio-political and economic system, thereby, reversing the much-desired achievement that the Nation would have recorded. In the words of Edoh, (2003), corruption and the thievery streak, especially of the ruling class has denied Nigeria billions of dollars that would have gone a long way in uplifting our lives and laying the foundation for socio-economic and political development of the nation. In a similar vein, Awojobi (1982) remarked that "Nigeria could have been one of the most prosperous nations in the world. But instead, it has squandered oil and mineral wealth, generated horrendously, unfair income distribution and has become notorious as one of the world's most corrupt countries". Corruption is an 'intolerable characteristic' (Fullerton 2000) that should be discouraged in governance because once it sets into any part, it automatically contaminates all the strata of the system's multidimensional hierarchy in ways symmetrical to the spread of bush fire. It is a major problem in developing countries. This has been largely as it diverts resources away from development and eradication of poverty. This has been largely so in Africa because as Goldsmith (2000), puts it "the continent has far too many political dinosaurs" , "tyrants" and " tropical gangsters" and "far too few states-men" as leaders', whose proclivity for shabby political goings-on like the "bleeding of the national economies for personal benefits" is unequalled within the global political community". This (as it, specifically relates to the Nigerian case) – is corroborated by the USAID Report (comet, 2000) according to which, Nigerians see corruption as very pervasive in the country. The report concretely showed that: 94% of those interviewed perceive some corruption including 52.8% who believe that people "always bribe officials". Almost three-fourth of respondents disagree with the statement that "bribery is not common among public officials in Nigeria. In fact as a result of

corruption, and its accompanying citizens' perception of state institution as systematically corrupt and unresponsive, coupled with the inability of most Nigerian leaders to see good governance as central to development, and flagrantly doing what they think is best for themselves, rather than what is best for the masses many, Nigerians have developed apathy to civic responsibilities. Through corruption write PA-NET (2000), the control of the state and access to it in Nigeria, still ranks among the fastest avenues to private accumulation (of public capital) and group betterment. The bleeding of national economy for personal benefits had variously contributed to the leakage of capital from Nigeria for illegal deposit abroad. This misuse of executive official position to misappropriate public money according to AFRIGOV (1995) has created a virile political landscape for the "politicization of corruption", which as Vital and Mahalingam (2000) once claimed; "flourishes because of the need for ever increasing funds for political purposes". Generally, corruption has caused incalculable damage to social and political development of Nigeria and, indeed of most polities in Africa. It has been particularly, so in Nigeria because: corruption has a long pedigree and, as a process, it has definitely threatened the existence of all governments. As a phenomenon, it runs deep in the life-line of all previous governments and, is even prominent in the present administration, whose functionaries played such key roles in the dark days of military dictatorship (Onoja: 2000). As a result of these and, the realization of its detrimental effects on the socio-political and economic growth and development of the Nigerian state, this research collaborates previous research attentions in this area with a view to determining the degree of its permeation of the Nigerian society in contemporary times, and how to check its proliferation. The rest of the paper is laid out thus; conceptualizing corruption and development, the theoretical thrust of the paper, specific features, manifestation and institutionalization of corruption in and its implication on development in Nigeria, combating corruption in Nigeria and concluding remarks.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

Generally, the conceptualization of the term corruption has long been elusive, ideologically, morally, culturally, politically and intellectually. As a result of this its definition has continued to be shrouded by value preferences and differences. Mcmillan (1961) defines corruption in the following way; a public official is corrupt if he accepts money or money's worth for doing something that he is under a duty to do anyway, that he is under duty not to do, or exercise a legitimate description for improper reasons. Otite (1986) in his own conceptualization sees corruption as the perversion of the integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour, or moral depravity. He adds that it involves the injection of additional but in proper transactions aimed at changing the moral course of events and altering judgments and position of trust. It consists of the doers (givers) and receivers' use of informal, extra-legal or illegal acts to facilitate matters. It is in this sense that one sees corruption as a lubricator of the social system, a means by which to overcome economic obstacles and bureaucratic red-tapism. Hence, the ambivalence and inconsistency in the theory and practice of corruption, although, it is generally regarded as a debasement of integrity, it may also serve as a nerve in social development.

Banfield (1975) used a conceptual schematization for his definition of this concept. He starts by emphasizing that the "frame of reference"(with regards to corruption) is one in which an agent (an employee) who has accepted the obligation (an employment contract) to act on behalf of his principal,(a person or organization), serves or fails to serve the interest of the principal. He also stresses that in acting on behalf of his principal, an agent must exercise some discretion. From this analogy, he explains the concept of corruption thus: an agent is personally corrupt if he unknowingly sacrifices his principal's interest to his own, that is, if he betrays his trust. He is officially corrupt if, in serving his principal's interest, he knowingly violates a rule; that is, acts illegally or unethically albeit, in his principal's interest. More so, Friedrich (1972) in defining corruption argues in the following manner: the pattern of corruption may be said to exist whenever a power holder who is charged with doing certain things, that is, a responsible functionary or office holder, is by monetary or other rewards, such as the expectation of a job in the future, induced to take action which favour whoever provides the reward and thereby damages the group or organization to which the functionary belongs (more specifically the government and, other socio-economic institutions). Considering the above definitions, it could be reasonably argued that, in spite of their limitations, they capture some essential defining ingredients of the concept which ranged from its typification as using of public or official positions in ways that forsake public interests (Mcmullan 1961); deviant behaviours that encourage private gains at public expense (Banfield 1975); maladtrusted behaviours that flagrantly violate the acceptable and legitimized norms of societal expectations (Otite 1986); to its conceptualization as spoiled unethically, polluted and rotten behavior that diverge from the formal and expected role which the society demands of everybody (Nye 1970).

Development on the other hand has equally suffered definitional precision. Nnoli (1988) sees development as a process heading to man's progressive and qualitative self-improvement. Rogers (1969), defines it as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capital income and levels of living through more production methods and improved social organization. These views corroborate Rodney's (1972), scientific conceptualization of development, which has to do with the ability of a people to discover the laws of nature (science), developed tools from these laws (technology}, the nature of organization of work (social relations), and the equitable sharing of that which has been socially or collectively produced to the enhancement of the quality of life of the generality of the people. In this sense, therefore, development has much to do with the value system and the class structures of a people in a historically determined economic system. And as rightly observed by Akav (2010), when the value system, especially of the ruling class becomes corrupt and commercialized, it seeps down to corrupt the rest of the classes in society, making it difficult for development to start, let alone sustain. The search for an explanation of the value degeneration and lack of development in the Nigerian political system underscores the choice of the Marxian political economy approach as the theoretical thrust of this paper. Marxian political economy, propounded by Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, derived its substance from classical or bourgeois political

economy associated with the works of David Ricardo, David Hume, Thomas Malthus, John Stuart Mills and Adam Smith. Bourgeois political Economy laid so much emphasis on the production, distribution and exchange of commodities without disclosing the essence of production as a social phenomenon or even analyzing the economic laws of capitalist system with sufficient level of consistency. Because of these shortcomings therefore, Marx described bourgeois political economy as "vulgar" and consequently introduced science for understanding society in its entirety. As Momoh and Hundeyin (1999) put it, Marx came out with a rebirth of political economy that scientifically studies the society in its totality and takes into consideration the inter-connection of social relations, class conflict and the organic relationship between the substructure (economy) and the super-structure (polity). The theory is based on dialectical and historical materialism. While the former emphasizes the contradictory nature of society, the latter explains how human society has moved through the various epochal periods to date. Mode of production is the way and manner in which resources are organized for production purposes. It has two components; viz: forces of production and the social relations of production. The former comprises labour power, objects of labour and means of labour, while the latter pertains to the kind of relationships that people enter into in the course of production. It is these relationships that form the basis of class configuration in all societies. Marxian political economy gives primacy to material conditions, particularly economic factors in the explanation of social life. The justification for giving economic factors such primacy, Ake (1981) maintains is because economic need is man's most fundamental need.

Unless man is able to meet his need, he cannot exist in the first place. Similar conclusions were also drawn by Engels (2004) elsewhere, when he states that: man must eat before he can do anything else. For example, worship or practice of politics. Hence what determines social life is the mode of production of a particular society (Yusufu 2004). Or as Marx himself puts it: the mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual process of like. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but on the contrary, it is their existence that determines their consciousness (Okoli 2003). At independence in 1960, the erstwhile colonial masters handed over political independence without economic independence to the Nigerian educated elites. They did this to perpetuate the country's economic ties to the cobweb of world capitalist matrix. The immediate attendant consequence of all this was reduction of Nigeria's economy to the status of a mere periphery and weak economy. And because of the weakness of her economy, the state also became weak and consequently found it difficult to grapple with the problems attendant upon a litany of demands from the citizenry. Thus economic inequality, which reproduces itself in other forms of inequality, began to reign supreme. Political power, which became the only access to wealth, was automatically made the "birth right" of the high and mighty in Nigeria. The Marxian political economy believes that if the wealth of a society is concentrated in the hands of a few who use that advantage to exploit the majority, the inequality consequent upon it may lead to social woes such a theft, 419, bribery and corruption, which in the end may bring about political instability in a state. The theory is

therefore, relevant as a tool of analysis, as it broadens our understanding and appreciation of social life as being a function of economic conditions.

SPECIFIC FEATURES MANIFESTATION AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF CORRUPTION AND ITS IMPLICATION ON DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

It is decipherable from the preceding arguments that corruption had long been incubated and fertilized in Nigeria. This has been due among other things, to the problems the concept has generated at theoretical, intellectual and practical levels. As a result of this, and, the continuous elusiveness of a universal criterion for its conceptualization and, for dealing with its perpetrators, it has become the features of many politics in the world and particularly Nigeria. In the process write Akindele (2005) and Anger (2002), it has continuously manifested itself and, had been institutionalized by its protagonists to the disadvantage and detriment of the micro and macro components of the Nigerian society. In short, many societies (including developed and developing ones) are ordered on the bedrock and contagious base of corruption and, once the latter (corruption) matures, its progenies become the core of citizens' orientation. This vividly explains the characteristics of the Nigerian political experience. These characteristics according to Odunlami (1999), and Gidado (1999) include among others: Corrupt ascendancy to political leadership through election rigging, annulment of election, son of the soil philosophy, politics of expediency, doctrine of tenperenters, judicial fractionalization of human beings, political self-aggrandizement, political Hitlerism (that is rule by force) as a safety-valve for retention of power, replacement of "we-feeling" by "me-feeling", contractor-controlled political machinery, uncurtailed lust for wealth, giving and receiving of kick-backs for government contracts (done or undone), police insistence on taking bribes as a precondition for performing their duties and, bureaucrats' indulgence in the act of falsifying accounts, false declaration of assets and age, falsification and forgery of certificates, perjuries inclination violation of oaths of office, payment of money for government's job not done, politically motivated assassinations of opponents, deliberate poison of political figures and opponents, and, manipulation of transition programme, Gerry-mandering/tinkering with constituencies, avoidance of taxes, entrenchment of black-market syndromes, manipulation of foreign exchange, import license frauds, pen robbery or looting of the public treasury, creation of "ghost workers" and so on.

In fact, the existence of this trend in Nigeria, which has changed "Government as an instrument of the state" (Nyerere, 1999) to an instrument of corruption and personal rulership, promoted the startling revelation of how Nigeria's oil wealth has been squandered among successive leaderships since its in discovery in Nigeria (Cook 997). This development re-echoed in the corrupt mismanagement of the Nation's gains from oil sales during the gulf-war. In fact these gains, according to David West (1998), "went to the servicing of Babangida's personal profligacy". Corruption in whatever form is a negation of ethical behavior or societal ethics which (Gbateman 2008), defined as "the code of moral principles that sets standards of good or bad, or right and wrong in one's conduct and thereby guides the behavior". Thus, it is inimical to the development of any society because it usually

perforates the building of a socio-politically feasible and, economically solvent nation through the selfish orientations and non-challenge (of those involved) to the nation's survival. And to a greater extent, political stability and militarization of political administration of many polities are progenies and progenitors of corruption. For instance, few of the military interventions and Guerilla insurrections from outside or within) have been justified by those who struck on any other ground than that of corruption and, determination to stamp it out. A good example is Nigeria where a retrospective analysis of its military experiences from 1966 to date by Momoh and Hundeyin (1999), actually, in the real sense of it, exonerates none of those who had struck at one time or the other from the citation of corruption of the ousted leaders or regimes as the catalyst for their intervention. The foregoing notwithstanding, the military themselves had, in most cases, later became blindly corrupt and uncontrollably rapacious in governance through fiscal indiscipline and recklessness to the detriment of the country over which they had presided (Williams 1980, Amagu, 1999). It is a Well-known fact writes Ademyi (1999), that corruption has become a way of public officers' life in Nigeria, to the extent that it is now an unwritten directive principle of state policy. It is a matter of fact that the culprits, the perpetrator of these highly placed corrupt practices are so few, yet so powerful. They control well over 85 percent of the nations, wealth... they could purchase the nation's silence and acceptance and if that fails could release a private army to take on the nation.

These developments fit into Ake's (1996) submission that: the state in Africa is not a public force but tends to be privatized in the sense that it is appropriated to the service of private interests by the dominant faction of the elite. The foregoing, which is a reflection of public expenditure management in Nigeria is one of mindless plunder of National wealth. It tends to justify the depiction of Nigeria as "a country where the robbery of state fund is flagrantly institutionalized" (Mbachu, 1993, Ofimum, 1999). This was succinctly put into perspective in 1993 by the centre for Advance Social Science (CASS) 1993), when it stated that. The problem is that the government which is needed to defeat corruption is the core of the problem in Nigeria. It is in government that corruption thrives most. Wasting resources we need, defeating all prospects of democracy and development, all sense of patriotism and turning all of us into hardened cynics with no concern for public good, no faiths in public morality or even in its possibility. On a contemporary note, the proclivity of the late dictator, General Sani Abacha and his men, Babangida, Abdusalami, Obasanjo and even the present Administration, for autocracy and ruination of the nation's economy through pen robbery and looting of the national treasury is unequalled in the annals of Nigeria's history. It is against this background that commitment by successive governments in Nigeria to the eradication of corruption has been nothing more than lip service to the nation. Given this, it is appropriate to state that, the putridity of corruption and its continuous holocaust effects on the socio-political, cultural and psychological nerves of the Nigerian polity, which has jinxed development call for combative attacks.

COMBATING CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: WHAT DO WE DO?

The question that needs to be asked at this point is that; what can be done to free the nerves of Nigeria from the crippling menace or shackles of corruption? Corruption has defied all measures adopted to combat it in Nigeria, apparently, because those waging the corruption wars are themselves corrupt. In the name of turning Nigeria into a corrupt-free society, the nation has experimented with many policies; it has tried the judicial commission of enquiry, the code of conduct Bureau, it has wrestled with the mass mobilization for social justice and economic Recovery (MAMSER). The Buhari Junta clobbered Nigerians with horsewhip, branded the war against indiscipline and corruption without success. Obasanjo administration instated the Independent and corrupt practices commission (ICPC) and the Economic and financial crimes commission, which seem to have power over the corrupt poor and the dead. In combating this menace, it has to begin with the reconstitution and transformation of the Nigerian state. The concentration of wide-ranging powers on the executive arms of government has sufficiently wiped out the practice of separation of powers and checks and balances. Given the general concentration of powers and resources at the centre, inevitably, the struggle for the office has been intense and prone to lawlessness. Relatedly, the transformation of the Nigerian state involves evolving a state that is active in maintaining a strong commitment to social welfare of the generality of the people. Also to tame the surge of corruption in Nigeria, the general population should be re-oriented to a better value system. This is because Nigerians have for long been living on the survival of the fittest and grab-whatever-comes-your-way-mentality. Preaching the gospel and practice of virtue is the ultimate solution to behavioural change and reduction in corruption.

Also to win the war on corruption, adherence to the ethical standards in decision-making must be the foundation of the nation's policies. Without ethics in the conduct of the affairs of the nation, the war on corruption in Nigeria will not be successful. Armed with ethics and virtue, the nation should then set out to reduce personal gains to corrupt behavior with tough penalties on the culprits, making tough penal statutes with vigorous enforcement can deter unethical behavior. One of the reasons for the upsurge of unethical practices in Nigeria has been the unrealistic pay and compensation patterns. In fact this has remained a prominent feature of the public service in Nigeria for a very long time. This has been responsible for the phenomenon of brain-drain, low productivity and corruption. To curb this problem, public servants should be paid regular salary to avoid the temptation of finding less honest means of survival. Also to tame corruption, this paper recommends that people in leadership positions should lead by example of high ethical standards, responsibility and accountability in the management of public affairs in consonance with the expectations of the people. The executive, legislature, judiciary and the civil society must be ready and willing to combat corruption and anti-corruption laws must be implemented to the letter. The Nigerian civil society should be fully informed and educated to realize and accept that corruption, apart from being morally and ethically unacceptable, is economically and politically destructive to the whole society. Therefore, agencies such as political parties, trade unions, human right institutions, religions bodies, non-governmental organizations and the media

should mobilize the Nigerian citizenry to hold public officials accountable for their actions and inactions. We should not only express our verbal support, but consider very seriously where each of us, in whatever organization or institution we may be involved, could make a contribution to achieving this laudable and necessary goal in order to build a future Nigeria where the principles of democracy, integrity, transparency and accountability are seen as an integral part of our society. Above all, Nigeria cannot be seen as secure and free until the people's human rights are respected and protected by the government. Nigeria cannot be considered secure if millions of people go hungry do not have a roof over their heads and to be jobless and sick indefinitely, with the most basic human right, the right to life is disregarded.

CONCLUSION

The future of development in Nigeria depends largely on the capacity of the political system to eliminate all the problems that had bedeviled the establishment and consolidation of democracy and development in the country. The greed, inefficiency, and gross mismanagement of the country's resources by the leadership, engender poverty, and hamper the development process. These must necessarily be removed if we must more on the development ladder. The anti-graft agencies must brace up for these challenges and rid our society of all forms of corruption and fraudulent practices.

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