

Corruption and Political Governance in Nigeria: Implication for National Development

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Abstract

This paper intends to bring out the correlation between corruption and good governance in Nigeria, arguing that the major obstacle to growth and development in Nigeria is corruption as exemplified in policy formulation and implementation. Drastic efforts are made in the paper to drawing analysis from the characters of Nigeria political leaders in relation to development. The paper critically examines both political and bureaucratic corruption as factors retarding economic development in Nigeria despite all the politics and anti-corruption reforms measure in Nigeria. Equally, the paper also re-emphasizes the need for good governance and focused political leadership as a basis for development

Introduction

The problem of corruption has been a crucial dimension of the perennial development crisis in Africa. Available records from the Transparency International as well as other relevant sources indicated that there is a high incidence of corruption in most African states. Such records have rated countries like Nigeria, Cameroon, Zaire, and Angola as corruption ridden states (see for instance Transparency International, 1998).

With reference to Nigeria, it is evident that corruption has been entrenched in all facets of public governance and the country. In effect, with the sphere of political governance in Nigeria, corruption has become quite pervasive and intractable. It has manifested in the fashion of kleptocracy, authoritarianism patronage syndrome, clientelism, malfeasance, perfidy, nepotism and outright plundering of the national patrimony by the political leadership alongside their cronies.

Away from the realm of public governance, corruption in Nigeria also manifests in the form of bureaucratic abuse by the public servants as well as general lack of integrity in all

facets of public and private lives in Nigerian society. Consequently, there has been an alarming incidence of official fraud. examination malpractice, judicial pervasion, extortion by the public security outfits, bribery and kickbacks, advance fee fraud (otherwise referred to as 419), to mention but a few.

The anxiety associated with corruption in Nigeria does not lie with its apparent pervasiveness per se. The problem is to the effect that the phenomenon of corruption has become so entrenched and intractable that it now constitutes a major threat to the country's endeavours to good governance and development.

In this paper therefore, an attempt is made to underscore the relationship between corruption and quality of governance in Nigeria. In the main, the paper intends to underscore the impact of the former on the latter with a view to suggesting the way forward. The underlying assumption of the paper is that political corruption has been a bane of good governance and sustainable development in Nigeria.

For convenience of effective presentation and systematic organization the balance of this paper is thematically structured under a number of sub-headings in an attempt to address the crux of the subject matter. But first, an attempt is made to situate the analysis within proper theoretical and analytical contexts. The next two sub-sections attend to this crucial concern

Corruption: A Theoretical Exploration

Structuralist thinkers have developed an important perspective to the phenomenon of corruption. These analysts tend blame the prevalence of corruption among developing countries on the general structural weakness as well as inefficiency of public institutions and integrity systems. Olson (1993) for instance has argued that the high incidence of corruption in less developed countries is traceable to absence of effective and enduring democratic structures that are accountable. Similarly, Gruber (1987) attributes the cause of pervasive corruption in developing countries to inefficient public bureaucracies that are neither transparent, efficient nor competent.

Klitgaard (1988), on his part, contends that corrupt behaviors prevalent in the developing states is essentially a manifestation of a poorly organized and inefficient political system, lacking in viable and effective integrity systems. Klitgaard seems to be arguing that the weaknesses and inadequacies of the custodian of national integrity, such as the executive, the judiciary, the parliament, the media, the civil society, etc. tend to breed corruption.

One of the most prominent and structural analysis of the causes of corruption has been provided by Rose-Ackerman (1998). According to her, the commonest incentive to corruption in developing countries has to do with the general weakness of the state and its relevant agencies. Rose-Ackerman goes further to highlight six market-related conditions which create incentives for corruption in developing countries as follows:

- i. The government may allocate a scarce benefit to individuals and firms using legal criteria other than willingness to pay.
- ii. Public officials may have little incentive to do their jobs.
- iii. Private individuals and firms may seek to lower costs of taxes, duties and regulations imposed on them by the government.
- iv. The government may confer large financial benefits on private investors and public officials.
- v. Bribes may substitute for legal forms of political influence.
- vi. The judiciary may have the power to impose costs and transfer resources, between litigants.

By and large, the structuralists posit that the causes of corruption in developing countries can be reduced to:

- i. Generally weak and ineffective public institutions that is inefficient, unstable and inconsistent.
- ii. Deep and unrelenting parochial relations resulting in ethnic divisions and incessant conflict over state resources.
- iii. Lack of accountable and undemocratic government; dominance of personalized rule.
- iv. Weak and inactive civil society that is largely ill-informed and ill-mobilized.
- v. Poorly structure and bloated bureaucracy that relies more on primordialism than on impersonality, merit and competence.
- vi. Highly skewed income distribution, giving rise to high socio-economic inequality.
- vii. Generally precarious political and economic conditions, necessitating sundry abuse.
- viii. Weak and often inconsistent legal rules and procedures, complicated by poor enforcement (Nwo.ye, 2000:88).

The anxiety manifest in this writing in relation to the structuralist conception of corruption arises from the subtle Eurocentric bias or stance of the perspective. This, in turn, raises doubts concerning the suitability, reliability and relevance of the perspective. According to Williams (1980):

Western methodology is far too inadequate in explaining non-Western societies and a lot more search is needed before the problems of (under) -development can be effectively understood and tackled in these countries (in Nwoye, 2000:90).

Ake (1983) corroborates the above observation by noting that Western social science in Africa generally constitutes imperialism to the extent that it asserts the superiority of capitalist values and foists a capitalist perspective on analysis. In effect, the Western perspectives to socio-economic and development problematic in developing countries do not take us far in coming to concrete terms with the real situation. Thus, there is still more to understanding social realities in these countries than is often readily presupposed (Okoli, 2001).

Against this backdrop, therefore, it is to be noted that the structuralist perspective to corruption is at best superficial and obscurantist. For one thing, it papers over historical circumstances of developing countries, failing thereby to take cognizance of the effects of slavery, imperialism and neocolonialism on these countries. Our contention here is that the so-called structural constraints which presumably engender corruption in developing countries have their roots in the aforementioned historical events: slavery, imperialism and neocolonialism. Furthermore, the structuralist perspective is bereft of materialist and pragmatic rigour. A materials: conception of corruption should make the sub-structural (economic) imperatives underlying the occurrence its point of departure (Okoli. 2007). By merely seeing corruption from the standpoint of structural weaknesses as: deficiencies, the structuralist perspective has failed to grapple with the fundamental basis of the phenomenon, which is the objective conditions (and contradictions) of the socio-economic system. We shall further establish this point in the next sub-section.

Re-conceptualizing Corruption: A Marxian Political Economy Departure

The Marxian political economy has its essence in historical and dialectical materialism (Beckman, 1983).

Characteristically, Marxian political economy approach is distinguished by its materialist conception and interpretation of realities. Contrary to the postulation of Hegel and other idealists, Marx argues that it is the material existence (matter) which determines consciousness. Marx thus believes that the “mode of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life processes in general” (Marx, 1968:181).

The above points have been more brilliantly captured by Tucker (1969:15) in the following words:

In every instance... the mode of productive activity has been the definitive fact of social epoch, the determinant of the character of society in all its super-structural expressions: political, legal, intellectual, religious...

Fundamentally, therefore, Marxian political economy is materialist, historical and dialectical in approach (Ake, 1981). Applying this to the present discussion, it is to be noted, first of all, that corruption necessarily has materialist essence and origin. To be sure, as a social reality, corruption is a function, a necessary outcome of societal material existence. Much as this phenomenon obtains within the realm of social existence, objective understanding of its occurrence must recognize the material context or circumstance that informs it.

Substituting what Nnoli (1980:11) surmises of ethnicity for corruption, this point may become more explicit:

As an element of the superstructure of society,
corruption rests on, is functional for, and is determined by the infrastructure of the society, the mode of production (the underlined is my substitute.

In short, the basis of corruption is better understood within the context of accumulative and survival tendencies which underpin social existence in developing societies. In this sense, one sees corruption as an expression of the primitive basis of capital accumulation among the upper class, and survival tactics among the lower class (Yaqub, 1998; Okereke, 2004).

In respect of the prevalence of corruption among the lower class, Okereke (2004:116) rightly observes:

The lower class... is poor, and being so, exhibit a strong present – time orientation and cannot defer gratification. They live from hand to mouth. They live on daily basis and exploit any situation that offers prospects of instant reward. ¹ For the poor lower class..., life is about survival.

In the above citation, the nexus between poverty and corruption is clear: people indulge in corrupt practices as a means of survival. But for the elites, as indicated above, corruption is a means of capital accumulation and material aggrandizement. Given the massive expropriation of the surplus generated in developing countries in the event of imperialism, what was inherited at independence was inadequate to satisfy the greed and avarice of the post-colonial elites (Yaqub, 1998). This situation, which has been complicated by the activities of multinational corporations in the post-colonial era, has created an atmosphere of material scarcity and insecurity among the populace. This predisposes the elites much as the masses to corrupt behaviour.

From the preceding discussion, it is evident that the prevalence of corruption in the developing countries has both historical and materialist origins. This repudiates the notion to the effect that corruption is structural or even attitudinal in origin.

Political Corruption in Africa: Contextual Framework

According to Aiyede (2006:38) “political corruption is the abuse or misuse of public or governmental power for illegitimate private advantage”. Other relevant conceptions of political corruption include:

i) An effort to secure wealth or

power through illegal means for private benefit at public expense

ii) The violation of established

rules for personal gain or profit

iii) Perversion of rules for the benefit of oneself or one’s party class, friend or family (Nwoye, 2000).

Forms of political corruption include, but not exclusive to, bribery extortion, influence peddling fraud, embezzlement, nepotism, patronage, general misrule, etc (Nwoye 2000). Endemic corruption is a common feature of authoritarian regimes, in post-independence Africa. The phenomena of corruption and authoritarianism have constituted the bane of good governance. Throughout the continent, despotic regimes have utilized their positions to amass personal fortunes, and to enable prebendalist cronies to enrich themselves at the expense of the populace. There have thus arisen some genre of despots who could afford to organize, disorganize and reorganize the state and economy for the purposes of extracting rents and pay offs in their highly *prebendalized* and rentier political economy. The Abacha’s regime in Nigeria (1994-1998) presented a veritable example. General Abacha’s regime was characterized by wholesale corruption, brigandage and military-inspired kleptocracy. In his short reign, General Abacha plundered the national asset through wanton looting of public funds to the tune of multi-billion Naira

In this act of infamy, General Abacha could be linked to Late Mobutu SeseSeku Zaire (now Congo DR), Late Tolbert and Samuel Doe (Liberia), Late MarciasNguema (Equatorial Guinea), Late Emperor J.B Bokassa (Central African Republic), Late Siaka Stevens (Sierra Leone), Late Houphouet Boigny (Ivory Coast) Late Ahuijo (Cameroon), Idi Amin and Milton Obote (Uganda), to mention but few.

Quite paradoxically, the malfeasance of authoritarian leadership has persisted in Africa, despite the apparent surge of Western-inspire democratization. As such, different patterns of autocratic or despotic regimes have existed in the continent under various pretensions of liberal or even “radical” democracy. Cases in point in this respect would include Paul Biya of Cameroon, Arap-Moi Daniel of Kenya, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Mammou Ghaddafi of Libya, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, and the host of their counterparts. In fact the contemporary trend is that some African authoritarian rulers are cleverly ‘civilianizing’ their

despotic rule without truly democratizing (their repressive political structures. It is in relation to this that Ake in Nwoye (2000:119) succinctly asserts:

Democracy has been reduced to the crude simplicity of multi party elections the benefit of some for the world's notorious autocrats who are now able to parade democratic credentials without reforming their repressive regimes

Corruption and Governance Crisis: the Nigerian Example

Unarguably, one of the single most important reasons for the crass instability and development crisis in Nigeria is widespread bureaucratic and political corruption (Ogundiya, 2009). The problem of bureaucratic and political corruption has been a long drawn issue in Nigerian politics. It has been acknowledge by several observers of Nigeria politics as a hidden disease of democracy and blight of development in the country (Ekeh, 1985).

Political and bureaucratic corruption has been responsible for acute crisis of legitimacy in political government in Nigeria. For instance, the phenomenon contributed in given rise to the various coups and counter coups that Nigeria has had since the 1960's. Apart from political instability, engendered by incessant military coups, corruption also played a dominant part in public governance during the military era. This was exemplified in gross misrule, kleptocracy, looting of public funds, civil arbitrariness and violation of human rights.

One other critical dimension of the impact of corruption on public governance in Nigeria is the question of electoral abuse and malaise. Elections in Nigeria over the years have become a Hobbesian activity, manifesting all patterns of farce, crime and violence. This has reduced the entire electoral process to a farce, lacking in all its democratic merits and significance.

The problem of political corruption in Nigeria has also found expression in massive plundering and misappropriation of public funds. This came to a head during the era of military rule. For instance, the military juntas led by late General Sani Abacha (1993-1998) carted away billions of Naira from the national treasury in a circumstance that bore out all trappings of kleptocracy.

Nigeria nascent democratic dispensation has not been bereft of political corruption. In fact, the trend appears to have worsened. For instance, it is a known fact that money and other 'irregular transfers' exchange hands between the executive and the legislature in the process of consideration and passage of appropriation bills. There is also high incidence of judicial perversion and partisan dispensation of justice.

This is in addition to the growing trend of god-fatherism which has been more or less established as a standing norm in the context of Nigeria's party politics. All these tendencies combine to obstruct Nigeria aspirations to good governance and development.

Democracy and Good Governance as a Desideratum

To depart from the status-quo characterized by political corruption and authoritarian leadership, African states need to embrace true democracy and good governance. The African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation (UNECA 1990), for instance, noted **that** the absence of participatory and mass based democratic rule is the major cause of chronic crisis and total lack of accountability in governance in Africa. The Charter specifically stressed the fact that official corruption and mismanagement are closely related to the absence of democratic participation and consensus building in African (Nwoye, 2000).

Similarly, the World Bank and IMF have equally emphasized the imperative of democratization and reformation of authoritarian rule as a means of advancing Africa's economic and political development (World Bank, 1981). Furthermore, Organizations such as: The European Union (EU) African Union (AU), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), have maintained the position to the effect that political authoritarianism and abuse of power are the bane of African leadership. They invariably regard democracy and good governance as a desideratum for African development. The nascent continental body, the African Union (AU), for example, has been concerned with mainstreaming of good governance across African states through the instrumentality of the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD) as well as the African Peer Review mechanism (APR). The whole gamut of this is geared towards the fight against corruption and misrule in the continent. This is in recognition of the rather destructive consequences of these phenomena to African political destiny.

Nigeria is part and parcel of the aforementioned multilateral endeavours at mitigating corruption at the continent level. Back home, Nigeria has shown immense political will and commitment towards combating the menace of corruption through a variety of policy and institutional frameworks. In effect, the anti-corruption crusade has been on course in the country under the championship of designated anti-graft agencies such as the Independent Corrupt Practice and other related Offences Commission (ICPC), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Public Complaint Commission (PCC).

Besides, the governments collaborates with a number of development partners as well as Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) within and outside Nigeria in the task of sensitizing the Nigeria citizenry against the ills of corruption and the need to fight the scourge. The effort emphasizes the ideals of integrity, patriotism and best practices in both public and private endeavors of the citizens. In this regard, there have been series of civic orientation public advocacy, and media programming designed to propagate integrity culture and the ideals of positive citizenship among the Nigerian populace.

These efforts have been receiving significant impetus from the on-going National Rebranding Project of the Federal Government as championed by the current Minister for Information and Communications, Prof. Dora Akunyili. The underlying motive of the whole crusade is to fight corruption through attitudinal change, institutional reforms and values reorientation. So far the anti-corruption campaign in Nigeria has come a long way, although

amidst problems and prospects; the greatest of which being the apparent lack of political will and commitment on part of the political leadership.

Conclusion

There is no gainsaying the fact that corruption is a bane of good governance and development. This fact has been established beyond every doubt in the African context where entrenched corruption has proved to be the major obstacle to nations, aspirations do good governance and sustainable development.

In this presentation, an attempt has been made to utilize the Nigeria example to show the correlation between corruption and crisis of good governance in Africa. The paper observes that pervasive incidence of corruption in Nigeria has eroded integrity systems in Nigeria and has made the attainment of good governance and development problematic. As the way forward, the paper recommends mainstreaming of integrity system and ideals of good governance through democracy and responsible citizenship.

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