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BUREAUCRATIC CORRUPTION AND ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGIES IN NIGERIA: AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This paper derives from the contemporary concern facing good governance and the sustainability of democratic government in Nigeria. The phenomenon of corruption i.e. bureaucratic corruption has negative implications on the nation and therefore capable of terminating our nascent democracy, hence, the need to curb or reduce to the bearest minimum the menace of corruption in the c untry. The paper examines the effects of bureaucratic corruption on the socio-economic as well as the political development of the nation and concludes that no democracy can thrive or survive where pervasive corruption is an enduring feature of such a nation, hence, recommends among others the need to "fight" corruption at all levels of government. This fight must be a collective responsibility of all Nigerians and not an exclusive preserve of the government. By so doing, the country will attain a higher level of development in the 21st century and beyond.

KEYWORDS : Bureaucratic corruption, Anticorruption, Socio-economic, Strategies in Nigeria.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Bureaucratic corruption is one of the most pervasive problems of administration in developing societies. During the colonial time, rationality on bureaucracy was super imposed by the colonial administrators. At the end of colonialism, bureaucracy emerged as the most powerful instrument of change and administration in developing societies.

Bureaucratic corruption existed in one form or the other in all traditional societies. Therefore, the history of bureaucratic corruption was so pervasive as it is in the developing societies of the present period. A large body of literature has been produced on the subject. However, this paper will examine the specific cases of bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria.

1.2 DEFINITION OF CONCEPT

There is no universally agreed definition of what bureaucratic corruption is. One of the reasons for this probably is that, there is no agreed meaning of what corruption is. However, contemporary literature suggests three different types of definition of corruption, including:

a. Public office – centred definition
b. Market – centred definition
c. Public interest – centred definition.

Most social scientists, however, seem to agree with the public-office-centred definition (Heidenheirner, 1978:4). Bayley (1978), McMullan (1978) and Nye (1978) are the most prominent representatives of the public –office-centred definition of corruption. For instance, Bayley (1978) noted that,

> "Corruption, while being tied particularly to the act of bribery, is a general term covering the misuse of authority as a result of considerations of personal gain, which needs not be monetary". McMullan (1978) asserts that "A public official is corrupt if he accepts money or money's worth for doing something that he is under duty to do anyway, that he is under duty not to do, or to exercise a legitimate discretion for improper reasons". Nye (1978) defined corruption as; "behaviour which deviates from the normal duties of public role because of private regarding (family, close private clique), pecuniary or status gains, or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private regarding influence". Bureaucratic corruption, according to these definitions given above, can therefore be conceptualised as an act of abuse of public trust. It involves sacrifice of public for private benefit.

1.3 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

In terms of various general theoretical perspectives on corruption, there are various explanations of bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria. Ekpo (1979) in his article "Gift-giving and bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria" presented an anthropological analysis. He argues that, the phenomenon in Nigeria has a history and that it is in fact a continuation of traditional gift-giving practices.

> "Nigerian tradition of gift-giving... is a prime mechanism of manipulation and influence in the social and cosmic order of traditional Nigerian society, and it is in addition, deeply ingrained in a complex systematic network of social alliances and status differences. If, in fact, a good deal of bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria is of the nature of an influence mechanism of the enforcement stage, then it becomes quite plausible to suggest, that, corruption in the country derives its ethnical legitimacy substantially from the recrudescent tradition of gift-giving".

In his essay "Corruption in Nigeria: A structural approach", Cohen (1979) argues that colonialism, post colonial factionalism and rapid growth and change have created certain structures in the bureaucracy (over centralisation of decision making, excessive hierarchy and programme inexperience). These maladaptive patterns, Cohen thinks, breed corruption in the bureaucracy and in the larger society as well. Cohen, having rejected the anthropological view, suggests massive institutionalisation of reforms for the eradication of corruption in the bureaucracy.

In his own contribution to the understanding of the phenomenon of corruption, Otite (1986:12) asserts that:

Corruption simply means the perversion of

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> integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour, or moral depravity. This implies an original state or expectation of individual and societal purity. When at least two parties have interacted to change the structure or processes of society or the behaviour of functionaries in order to produce dishonest, unfaithful or defiled situations, we may say that corruption has taken place. Corruption involves the injection of additional but improper transactions aimed at changing the normal course of events and altering judgements and positions of trust. It consists in the "doers" 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 (Otite, 1986:12).

Corruption is a value-oriented word. It is difficult to discuss it without emphasising its moral aspects. Corruption however, can be defined as any act by a public official which violates the accepted standard of behaviour in order to serve private or selfish ends. The end which this behaviour will serve may be social, economic or political. These standards may be legal or conventional. The emphasis is on the violation of such legal or conventional norms for private gains (Ndubisi, 1986:142).

Corruption has become institutionalised in Nigeria to the point that virtually all public officials are engaged in one form of corruption or the other. Ibrahim (2003) opined that the military has entrenched the culture of public corruption established by earlier civilian regimes when he stated thus:

> Under the Babangida, Abacha and Abubakar Administrations, what used to be known as corruption became the art of government itself. There was a complete prebendalisation of state power and virtually all acts by public officials involving public expenditure or public goods of any kind led to the appropriation of state finances or property by officials. The routine operations of government were being subjected to prebendal rules. It was widely known for example that officials of state governments and parastatals had to pay, as they put it, "up front", a percentage of their statutory allocations to the Presidency, Ministry of Finance and Central Bank Officials before their statutory allocations were released (Ibrahim, 2003:5).

Akanbi (2004:2) noted that corruption can be described as a situation whereby government officials and/or private economic agents allow personal and narrow interests to override considerations of the larger public good. Corrupt acts include bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed-money, embezzlement, over-invoicing, "kick-back", the "ghost worker" syndrome, award of contracts to front companies belonging to public officials, payment for non-existing projects etc. Therefore, the involvement of any public officials in any of the aforementioned acts with a view to acquire "wealth" at the detriment of the public is engaged in an act of corruption. This act of corruption has a negative implication on the socio-economic as well as the political development of the nation.

But for a dynamic analysis of bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria, both the anthropological and structural approaches seem to be useful. Colonial and post-colonial modernization processes have created new bureaucratic institutional structures. A systematic analysis is needed to show how and to what extent these new institutional structures fit into the traditional value systems, how and to what extent they challenge the traditional value systems relating to power, control and authority, how and to what extent these new institutional structures themselves are changed to fit into the traditional social structures. The bureaucrats are not born corrupt. Corruption develops under certain socio-historical structures. These structures need to be carefully identified and their origin and growth need to be assessed if a systematic search for a causation of corruption has to be made.

1.4 CAUSES OF BUREAUCRATIC CORRUPTION

Corruption in bureaucracy means the sacrifice of public for private benefit which existed in all bureaucratic centralised states and empires (Klaveren, 1978; Hoselitz, 1978). Corruption as a form of action in bureaucracy, is universal across time and place but its cause are dynamic elements of social life. In our present context, what is important is the understanding of the causes of bureaucratic corruption in contemporary modernizing societies.

As Wertheim (1965) describes it all, we have to take into account that the post-war forms of so-called corruption still frequently conceal relics of the traditional social structure. The patrimonial- bureaucratic sub-structure still influences all other sections of the society, while traditional family ties continue to clash with modern concepts of morality in public affairs. Colin Leys (1965) said:

> ".....traditional gift-giving can be distinguished from a bribe of money, it is quite obvious that, from the point of view of the giver, the one has shaded into the other, so that although the practice has taken on a new significance ... it is nevertheless an established fact of life, in which the precise nature of rule-infringement is partially concealed by continuity with our older custom".

Syed Alatas (1968), however, has been very critical of this anthropological approach to bureaucratic corruption. He said:

> "An exposition of the forms of corruption suggests that corruption, like a parasitic plant, will creep around any suitable firmament serving its purpose and, of all the possible firmaments, the institution of the gift is the most obvious. But this fact alone does not justify the conclusion that the gift is an indirect causal agent peculiar to the region in the growth of corruption in underdeveloped areas. The gift is a universal institution which is prevalent in western society as much as it is in other parts of the world. That there is no significant causal correlation between the fact that, the expansion and contraction of corruption has nothing to do with a similar occurrence in the field of gift behaviour".

According to another perspective, bureaucratic corruption is related to modernization. Samuel Huntington (1978) is the most prominent scholar in this tradition of corruption analysis. He said, "why does modernization breed corruption"? Three connections stand out:

a. Modernization involves a change in the basic values of the society, that is, new standards and criteria of what is right and wrong lead to condemnation of at least some traditional behavioural patterns as corruption.
b. Modernization also contributes to corruption by creating new sources of wealth and power, that is, a relation which politics is undefined by the dominant traditional norms of the society and on which the modern norms are not yet accepted by the dominant groups within the society.
c. Modernization encourages corruption by the changes

it produces on the output side of the political system.

The sociological approach to bureaucratic corruption suggests, that, it is the result of power-status relationships. The adherents of this approach argue that, the institutionalised system of unequal rewards is the very basis for the commission of acts of corruption (Ekpo, 1979).

The political approach to corruption on the other hand, holds the view that bureaucratic corruption is an informal means to exert influence at the enforcement stage of the political process. According to Scott (1979), corruption will be prevalent when channels to influence policy outcome at the input stage of the political process are, for some reasons, unavailable.

Thus, various lines of argument have been made to examine what causes bureaucratic corruption. There is, however, a consensus of opinion on the assertion that bureaucratic corruption is a complex phenomenon of multiple causation. "There is no simple cause of corruption, nor are there two or three sole causes", (Ekpo, 1979). Braibanti (1979) argues that, there is a complicated matrix of causes, each of which is of varying importance depending on spatial, temporary and circumstantial factors. According to him, some of the causal elements are personal virtue, education, religious teaching, colonialism, poverty, severe punitive measures, environment, structure of government, a transitional stage, special training reflection of society and human nature. Braibanti further observed that, "from the survey of twelve factors, to cause of corruption, he suggested that, each of them is a determinant of corruption only as part of a larger constellation of causes".

Yakubu (2003:49) asserts that corruption can simply be defined as "an inducement by means of an improper consideration to violate some duty". Corruption is a social problem; the nature of it and the extent to which it has permeated a particular society must be determined in the context of that particular society. Notwithstanding this conclusion, it could be said that in all societies where corruption has become their bane, it manifests itself in the nature of fraud, gratification, use of office for pecuniary advantage, influence peddling, underserved pay, tardiness and slovenliness.

The pervasiveness of the phenomenon of corruption in our body politics may lead to the erosion of public confidence in the act of governance. However, the crisis of legitimacy that accompany corruption has the tendency of terminating our nascent democracy. Hence, the need to combat the phenomenon.

1.5 CONSEQUENCES OF BUREAUCRATIC CORRUPTION

There are two contrasting modes of argument on the consequences of bureaucratic corruption. The functional theory of corruption suggests that, it has some positive contributions to make for the progress of underdeveloped areas. With regard to India, Weiner (1962) asserted that, "indeed, the *bakshish* system is not as disruptive as might first appear. It lends to the administrative system discretion and flexibility... without which many businessmen would find it difficult to function". He also noted that, the efforts to influence local administration, even though widespread corruption, are not wholly detrimental to political and perhaps, even to economic development. Leff (1978) in his contribution argued that, corruption promotes economic development by reducing risk and uncertainties of investment by helping new innovations to establish, by creating intense competition and promoting favourable politics for the economic entrepreneurs. Bayley (1978) maintained that, "the corruption in developing nation is not necessarily antipathetic to the development of modern economic and social system; that it serves in part at least a beneficial function in developing societies". Abueva (1978) asserted that, "not only are rampant nepotism, spoils and graft unavoidable under the circumstances of most developing countries, but they may have positive, unanticipated consequences for political development".

Another mode of argument holds the view that bureaucratic corruption is dysfunctional. For instance, Myrdal (1978) viewed, "the popular notion, occasionally expressed by Western students of conditions in South Asia, that corruption is a means of speeding up cumbersome administrative procedures is probably wrong". He noted that, corruption counteracts the striving for national consolidation, decreases respect for and allegiance to the government, and engenders political instability. Hossain (1968) in his book, *The Sociology of Corruption*, strongly attached the functional view of bureaucratic corruption. He observed that, "when the total effect of corruption on afflicted societies, whether in the economic, administrative, political or judicial realms is considered, no stretch of sociological imagination could ever succeed in suggesting that, it has some positive function in development, except in the development of exploitation, inequality and moral and legal disorder".

Most social scientists, however, seem to support the view that, corruption is detrimental to societal development. Bureaucratic corruption, as a problem, probably cannot be entirely removed from any society. But with sound policy measures and institutional development, it can be significantly reduced. Hoselitz (1978) therefore concluded that, the functional view of corruption is methodologically wrong and theoretically inadequate.

1.6 BUREAUCRATIC CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

Bureaucratic corruption is a widely prevalent phenomenon in Nigeria. It is openly practiced in nearly all ministries, departments and governmental agencies. For instance, investigations initiated by the Murtala Government into the conduct of affairs by public servants have brought to light massive inefficiencies nepotism, corruption and mismanagement. Consequently, during the last months of 1975, by over 10,000 public servants (15 percent of the civil service), many of them in high office were forcibly retrieved, (West Africa, 8th December, 1977).

Similarly, bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria was the central reason for the 1966 military coup. Shortly after the coup, Major Nzeogu made a broadcast that, corruption was the main issue. On the other hand, the record of the military since it acquired power under Gowon was as good (Ekpo, 1979). Furthermore, while he was visiting the United States of America, President Shagari was once asked by the CBS journalist "Mr. President, what is your administration doing to combat the problem of bribery and corruption which is too prevalent in your country?" President Shagari replied, "Corruption, like inflation is an imported phenomenon into the African society. Before the arrival of the Europeans in Africa, we did not have such things as ten percent commission, kickbacks and greasing the wheel. They are all imported business languages from the west. Thus, the President too recognised the prevalence of widespread bureaucratic corruption in Nigeria, to mention but a few instances.

a. Corruption in the routine course of government business: under this category are:
   i. Bribes paid to have compromising documents removed from files.
   ii. Fraudulent use of official stationary
   iii. Payment for office visits
   iv. Payment for letters of recommendation
   v. Kickbacks for hiring
   vi. Permanent kickbacks (no fault bribes)
   vii. Phony travel documents and official travel related peccadilloes
   viii. Misuse of official housing
   ix. Two salaries and neglect of public service for outside businesses
   x. Salary computerisation fraud
   xi. Embezzlement (in its many varieties)

b. Corruption in the exercise of substantive government programmes: Under this category are:
   i. False bills
   ii. Income tax fraud
   iii. Excise tax fraud
   iv. Import tax fraud
   v. Business auditing fraud
   vi. Export tax fraud
   vii. Tax-stamp fraud
   viii. Postal fraud
   ix. Court tempering
   x. Military and police shakedown

Almost all of the above categories of bureaucratic corruption are found in Nigeria. There are a lot of instances reported in the dailies which some of them can be explain below. Fraud exists in many forms as highlighted above. The forms they take are better explained in the following manner.

(a) Bid to defraud the nation of N44 million foiled: Daily Times front page, April 4, 1980.
(b) Naira for sale at black market overseas (quantity unknown): Sunday tribune, back page, July, 1980.
(c) N1 million for contraband seized: Sunday tribune, back page, July 1980.
(d) N1 million pay loss in Ministry of Education, Benue state; Daily Times, February 9, 1981.

The way the fraud occurs determines its type hence the existence of various titles as mentioned above

Therefore, it is considered unnecessary to mention them here. It should be noted however that, mass media does not report all they know. Only a part, a very small part could be revealed. They select only the most noteworthy items.

1.7 ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGIES USED IN NIGERIA

Many strategies in the past have been used in Nigeria to cure the endemic at one point or the other with only limited effect in the Nigerian bureaucracy.

a. Operation purge the nation

Following the ousting of General Gowon in a bloodless coup of July 29, 1975, he was succeeded by General Murtala Muhammed. The change of government was from all indications very well received by the Nigerian populace who thought, it was necessary and timely. It was followed immediately by a state of disciplinary directives aimed at "cleaning up' the society and generally shaking the country up from its protracted lethargy.

When the new regime assumed office (in an attempt to show its reform oriented administration), it embarked on dismissal of "dead wood" from the Nigerian public service in an attempt to instill discipline in the public service, the regime started with itself by sacking officers in the rank of Major General and above. Attention subsequently, shifted to the civil service, the police force, customs and institutions of higher learning. Over half of the heads of departments in the federal civil service were retired, terminated or dismissed. The reasons given were among others, poor health, old age, inefficiency and malpractices. This action caused severe strain, uncertainty and even temporary dislocation (Balogun, 1976).

The battle against corruption was a major landmark of the administration. Not that corruption was eliminated, but, for the first time in the history of Nigeria, former highly placed government officials were called upon to account for their wealth and to refund whatever they had acquired illegally or corruptly.

b. The institutionalisation of punitive measures

Apart from more retirement of public servants, the government established two institutions:

i. Corruption Practices Investigation Bureau
ii. Public Complaints Commission (Ombudsman)

The purpose was to keep vigilance over the commitment of public servants.

c. Code of ethics for public officials

Apart from the establishment of the Permanent Corruption Investigation Bureau, a Code of Ethics in the form of an oath, was introduced for public officials (Public Service Review Commission, 1974). The code of ethics is as follows:

i. I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to the Federal Republic of Nigeria at all times.
ii. I will never discriminate on the basis of religion, tribe, cult or status or practice any form of partiality in the performance of any official duties.
iii. I will always place service to the public above selfish interest, realising that a public office is a public trust.
iv. I will always perform my official duties diligently and efficiently and will not engage or be involved in any activity in conflict either directly or indirectly with this pledge.
v. I will eschew and expose corruption in performance of my official duties, and I will also not corrupt or aid and abet corruption in all its facets in and outside the public service.
vi. I will always follow the path of justice honestly and concord in all I do. So help me God.

It must be stated that, the mere pronouncement of these code of ethics does not necessarily guarantee compliance. Inspite of all these damnation of corrupt practices, one is bound to ask, why does corruption persist?

d. The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC)

The present administration under President Obasanjo sensed the danger and also being part of the previous attempts to eradicate the corruption in the system found it necessary to establish the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) whose aim is not very much different from the previous attempts.

The performance of this body or otherwise is not the intention of this paper to appraise since it has just taken off. However, it might be necessary to make some suggestions to improve the performance of the ICPC towards achieving the objective(s) for which the body stands to achieve as part of little contribution to eradicate corruption in the system.

1.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the discussions so far, there is no one cause of bureaucratic corruption and so there is no one way of controlling it. However, the following suggestions may assist in eradicating the endemic:

i. Detachment from political pressure. That is, isolation of bureaucracy from the pressures of society which would otherwise obligate the bureaucrat to any particular group or confuse the disinterestedness of his judgement.
ii. Diffusion of information about government throughout society.
iii. An ideology of austerity to curb desire for material gain.
iv. Salary must be adequate
v. Get to know your workers. Discuss their problems with them and honestly try to be helpful.
vi. Get into a transactional analysis made and talk to him/her, as a colleague, explaining how his/her action was inimical to him/herself and the public.
vii. Live above corruption yourself. Set example with your simple, honest and hardworking lifestyle.
viii. Regularly evaluate the performance of your staff while implementing a project. Raise questions when standards are not being met.
ix. Mete out some punishment for wrong actions
x. Rehabilitate or fine the individual depending on the political costs of reprimanding the individual.

1.9 CONCLUSION

Corruption has been a source of growing concern to both policy and academic circles, and this is so because of its negative attributes which may be detrimental to the socio-economic as well as the political development of the nation. The phenomenon of corruption can be said to be an antithesis to the developmental efforts of the government, hence, the need for both the government and the citizen to "fight" against this monster called corruption.

No democracy can thrive or survive in the mist of pervasive corruption. As a matter of fact, it has the tendency of terminating democracy because the basic ingredient of good governance which is a sine-quanon for the survival of a democracy would be lacking. Therefore, if Nigeria is to move forward in the 21st century and beyond, the phenomenon of corruption must be tackled adequately so that growth and development will not be an illusion.

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