





## **Corruption and Economic Development in Nigeria: Connections and Evidence from the Power Sector (1999- 2007)**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The concern for achieving and sustaining high level of economic development is usually a top priority issue for governments all over the world. Hence, when economic development is planned and financed, what usually determines the success rate is the extent to which the resources earmarked for projects are judiciously and accountably used to meet predetermined goals. Focusing on the power sector between 1999 and 2007, this paper highlights the linkages between corruption and economic development in Nigeria. It argues that corruption in the power sector has significantly hindered economic development in Nigeria. It has contributed to de-industrialization, compounded poverty and unemployment, and undermined human security, among others. Thus, for corruption to be drastically reduced in Nigeria, the paper recommends the introduction and strengthening of more preventive, punitive and inter-agency cooperative measures.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The concern for achieving and sustaining high level of economic development is usually a top priority issue for governments all over the world. This is underscored by the fact that economic development in a country largely promotes wealth creation, poverty reduction, and improved standard of living for the citizens. Unlike manna that may fall from heaven, 'economic development does not just happen in a country; it must be planned and financed' (Oludoyi, 2006:16). The financing of economic development involves investment in various critical infrastructures such as power (electricity), education, transportation, water, among others. When economic development is planned and financed, what usually determines the success rate is the extent to which the resources earmarked for projects are judiciously and accountably used to meet predetermined goals. This implicates the issue of mismanagement and corruption as obstacles to economic development.

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Between 1999 and 2007, the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo planned and financed the power sector in order to jumpstart economic development in Nigeria. Despite the huge resources expended on the power sector, current electricity supply in the country cannot reliably serve the need of one state out of Nigeria's thirty-six states. However, there has been significant improvement in power supply throughout the country, especially since the last quarter of 2009. This positive development however does not foreclose the imperative of addressing critical questions regarding how mismanagement or embezzlement of public fund in the power sector has directly or indirectly impacted on economic development in the last decade of democratic politics in Nigeria.

In this light, a number of peripheral and substantive questions are pertinent. What is corruption? What is economic development? How do we interpret the relationship that exists between corruption and economic development? How do we evaluate the impact of corruption on economic development in Nigeria, in relation to the power sector? And how can the high incidences of corruption in Nigeria, especially in the public sector, be combated? These questions have been necessitated by the recent past developments in Nigeria, and the present article addresses it from a critical perspective.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This article adopts a framework that interprets the relationship between corruption and economic development as interfacial, although negatively but integrally related. The framework begins with a conceptual clarification of terminologies – corruption and economic development – and proceeds to offer a schematic illustration of the perceived relationships.

The definition of *corruption* remains contentious. In fact, there are as many definitions of corruption as there are scholars, analysts and institutions trying to grapple with it. Etymologically, the word corruption is derived from the Latin word 'rumpere', meaning 'to break'. This connotes the breaking of normal or societal norms or practices (Ifesinachi, 2003:25). For instance, Transparency International (2006:4) defines corruption as "the abuse of public office for private gain". Similarly, the World Bank (1997:102) sees corruption as "the abuse of public power for private gain". For Nye (1967:418), corruption is "behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role (elective or appointive) because of private regarding (personal, close family, private clique) wealth or status gains; or violates rule against the exercising of certain private regarding influence". Although many useful definitions of corruption, varying in their emphasis, have been posited, the one which best provide the emphasis needed here was postulated by Osoba as:

A form of anti-social behaviour by an individual or social group which confers unjust or fraudulent benefits on its perpetrators (and) is inconsistent with the established legal norms and prescribed moral ethos of the land and is

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likely to subvert or diminish the capacity of the legitimate authorities to produce fully for the material and spiritual well-being of all members of society in a just and equitable manner (cited in Jike, 2005:156).

From the foregoing, one thing that is inescapable is that corruption entails actions or inactions that pervert the socially accepted behaviour, established laws, and prescribed moral ethos of a given society.

One helpful way of understanding the meaning of economic development is to look at the economy. The economy is the subsystem of patterned interrelated activities and interaction involving individuals, households, firms, industries, organisations, and governmental institutions in the process of production, regulation, exchange, distribution, and consumption of goods and services within a society. Given the complex nature of the economy, Kindleberger (1977:1) offered a useful definition of economic development that we quote him *extenso*:

Economic development is generally defined to include improvements in material welfare, especially for persons with the lowest incomes; the eradication of mass poverty with its correlates of illiteracy, disease, and early death; changes in the composition of inputs and outputs that generally include shifts in the underlying structure of production away from agricultural toward industrial activities; the organisation of the economy in such a way that productive employment is general among the working-age population rather than the situation of a privileged minority; and the corresponding greater participation of broadly based groups in making decisions about the directions, economic and otherwise, in which they should move to improve their welfare.

In this sense, economic development refers to the unending process of qualitative and quantitative transformation in the economy of a society such that less scarce resources are used to satisfy greater number of societal needs for self-sustenance and self-improvement.

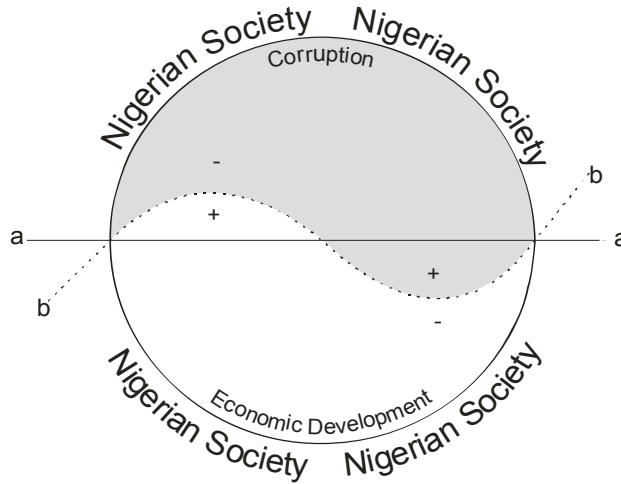
Against this backdrop it becomes easier to appreciate how corruption impinges on economic development in a society, including Nigeria. As shown in figure 1 below, both corruption and economic development are features of every society, whether of advanced or developing countries. The key assumption is that there is no time or stages in a society where we can have zero corruption (that is no record of corruption) or no development. Corruption and development have been basic features of human society since mankind's struggle to transform his environment. Both are products of the internal logic and dynamics of society. The degree of their manifestation in a particular society is however basically a product of the nature of measures put in place by such society.

In this light, the state of corruption and economic development are directly interfacial. This is what is indicated by the straight broken line (a) dividing the two variables into two parts in figure 1. Thus, when corruption increases (+), it reduces the level of economic development (-). Conversely, increase in the level of economic development (+) usually, but not exclusively, leads to a decrease in the level of corruption (-), as indicated by

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the movement of the broken line (b). This means that when corruption expands to a higher level, a society records low level of economic development. Conversely, when the implementation of stringent measures suppresses corruption, a society begins to witness higher level of economic development.

**Fig 1 Relationship between Corruption and Economic Development**



Source: Author's Analysis

The dynamics of these shifts are essentially driven by the nature of three critical factors in a society: institutions, structures and leadership (ISL). First is the presence of strong institutions that clearly specify what constitute corruption and provides commensurate punishment thereto. Institutions are one of the basic building blocks of all societies, and as societies have grown in scale and complexity (Abrutyn, 2009:450), they have adopted new institutions or refined existing ones to cater for exigencies. Thus, the existence of effective institutions, especially laws, is crucial to suppressing corruption.

These institutions would be otiose if there are no agencies or organisations to enforce them. This underscores the importance of the second critical factor: the existence of functional and effective structures to combat corruption. Such structures cover governmental and non-governmental agencies established to combat corruption, such as the ICPC, the EFCC, Code of Conduct Bureau, among others, in Nigeria.

Meanwhile, institutions and structures are incapable of suppressing corruption if they are not driven by effective leadership. Effective leadership, both at the highest political realm of society and at the micro-organisational

level of agencies fighting corruption, is crucial to combating corruption. The individual critical in this regard is the leaders. A leader is taken here to mean someone who acts as a guide, directing head or a chief in the management of affairs of a nation, society, organisation or group of persons (Idowu, 2009:55).

Viewed in this way, corruption in a society negatively impacts on economic development, because it undermines the effective functioning of the critical sectors or the provision of social deliverables (power, education, health, among others) that drive qualitative and quantitative transformation of society. Therefore the task facing corruption-ridden states such as Nigeria is to design and implement robust and sustainable measures that would drastically reduce corruption to enhance economic development.

### **Corruption And (Economic) Development: Overview Of Contending Debate**

Arguably, corruption has become an issue of major political and economic significance in recent years, leading to a resurgence of interest in analyzing its implications for development, especially in developing countries. In the 1960s and 1970s, scholars mostly economists were mired in a debate on effects of corruption on development. The debate bifurcated scholars into opposing camps: functionalists and critics.

The *functionalists* contend that corruption plays a beneficial role in the process of modernisation and development in a society. They argue that corruption helps to overcome the obstacles arising from inefficient bureaucracy; serves as an important source of capital formation; affords the citizens the means to gain access to public officials; provides alternative source of income to poor public servants; and equally promotes political development, and by ricochet economic development (see among others Leys, 1970; Huntington, 1968; Leff, 1970; Nye, 1970). In other words, it is argued that there are circumstances in which corruption might enhance efficiency; for example, a bribe designed to circumvent a distortionary tariff (Haggard, MacIntre and Tiede, 2008:211).

*Critics*, however, contend that corruption undermines economic growth and development. Specifically, they argue that corruption weakens bureaucratic efficiency, undermines government capacity for service delivery, erode legitimacy, leads to the misplacement of priority, exacerbate the burden of the poor and marginalised groups, and doubles the cost of government projects (see among others, Myrdal, 1970; Waterbury, 1973; Krueger, 1974; Caiden, 1976).

Amidst this debate, a common viewpoint vis-à-vis the relationship between corruption and development, particularly in the context of developing countries, sees corruption as dysfunctional and inimical to development in society. Hence, it is the position of this article that corruption constitutes a fetter to (economic) development in a society, notwithstanding the argument of functionalists.

**Corruption In Nigeria: Overview Of Nature And Manifestations**

Corruption is one key defining element of public and private life in Nigeria. However, the public sector in Nigeria is the first obvious domain of corruption essentially because of the rentier nature of the Nigerian state. Corruption in Nigeria is multifaceted. It includes a wide range of offences such as bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, favoritism, money laundering, and advanced free fraud, among others. It manifests in different forms, such as the inflation of government contracts in return for kick backs; examination malpractices; corporate fraud; tax evasion; falsification of accounts in the public services; taking of bribes, and perversion of justice among the police, the judiciary and other organs in the justice system; falsification of certificates; printing of fake currency; and misappropriation of public fund, among others. It is also common to hear of corruption in Nigeria being categorized as electoral, political, corporate and bureaucratic corruption.

Which ever way it is viewed, one obvious fact is that corruption has become largely institutionalized in Nigeria in a way that both the leaders and followers have learnt to live by it such that no aspect of our national life seems immune to the canker worm. However, its impacts tend to disproportionately affect the poor in the society. Corruption, like manure in a farm, enriches the breeding ground for the blossoming of overt threats that undermine development, security and good governance in Nigeria (Author, 2009: 4).

**Corruption And The Power Sector In Nigeria: Emerging Evidence (1999 -2007)**

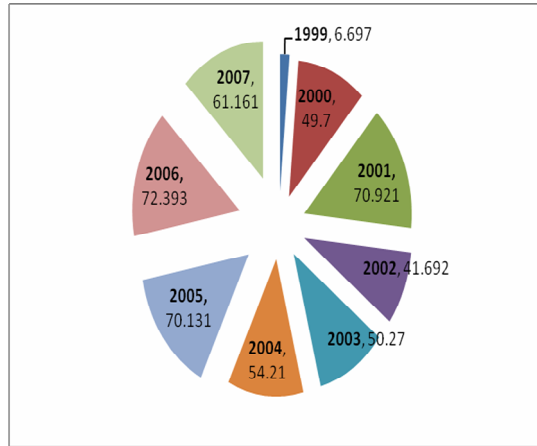
Since 1896 when the first power plant was installed at Marina in Lagos for residential and street lighting purposes, the history of power supply in Nigeria has been the history of poor supply of the public good. Electricity supply has never exceeded demand in Nigeria. However, the deplorable power situation became particularly worrisome since the last two decades owning largely to the protracted years of neglect of the sector during military rule, and partly as a result of corruption and malfeasance in the sector in the last eight years of democratic politics in Nigeria.

Long before the onset of civil rule in 1999, the lack of electricity to propel Nigeria's economic development had generated a lot of debate. However, the return to democracy in May 1999 ushered in high hopes that the issue of the power sector would be given the needed attention so as to revive Nigeria's moribund economy. The administration of President Obasanjo started off well with the articulation of various brilliant intervention projects such as the National Integrated Power Projects (NIPP), Independent Power Projects (IPP), Commercial Reorientation of Electricity Sector Toolkit (CREST), and the unbundling of NEPA, among others. As shown in figure 2, huge budgetary allocations were appropriated for the

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sector in the last eight years, totalling ₦ 477.175 for the period. Although these appropriations may not be the actual amount released to the sector, the past administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo was alleged to have wasted over \$16 billion on the power sector.

**Table 1:** Amount of Money Appropriated and Released for the Power Sector (1999-2007)



**Source:** Adapted from Nkwazema (2008:1)

This amount is in addition to over \$8.5 billion loan from the World Bank expended on the NIPP (Nkwazema, 2008:1). This huge investment in the sector never translated to improved power supply, leading to the description of the sector as ‘the most corrupt public sector in Nigeria between 2004 and 2005’ (Aminu, 2006:37). The Obasanjo’s administration promised to solve the problem in six months, then in 18 months, then by the end of 2007, when Nigerians were assured of 10 000 megawatts (MW) of electricity. However, in the first week of May 2008, power generation had fallen to an abysmal 860 MW, a quantity not even sufficient for Lagos State (The Guardian, 2008:18). At the root of the problem is the mismanagement of fund earmarked for various projects in the power sector. President Yar’ Adua gave an insight into the situation when he asserted that:

While we are targeting 6000 megawatts by 2009, the \$10 billion invested in the sector between 2000 and 2007 has not translated into power generation, transmission and distribution, so we are exercising caution to ensure that any further funds to the sector would translate into production and delivery of energy to the ordinary Nigerian (cited in Nwankwere, 2008).

In response to the allegations of gross misappropriation of public fund for the power sector by the Obasanjo’s administration, the House of Representative of Nigeria’s National Assembly mandated its Committee on Power, led by Mr. Ndudi Elumelu, to probe spending in the sector under the Obasanjo administration. After several weeks of probing of financial



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transactions in the sector and visitation of projects sites across the country, the Elumelu-led Committee documented evidence of gross malfeasances, failure to follow due process in the award of contracts, and outright abandonment of power projects of which over ninety per cent of the contract sum has been paid to the contractors. One example of how corruption in the power sector results in mega-projects that benefit the powerful but neglect the real concerns of the poor relates, for example, to the Kainji and Mambilla hydropower projects.

In April 2005, the German engineering company Lahmeyer, got a contract to carry out a feasibility study for the huge Mambilla hydropower project in northern Nigeria. The 2,600-megawatt project would dam three rivers, and has been dubbed Nigeria's Three Gorges Project. Lahmeyer was supposed to carry out its Mambilla contract within 15 months, and collected \$3.2 million for it. Yet nothing happened on the ground. The company only set up a bungalow near the future dam site, to create the appearance of project activities (Bosshard, 2008).

The Elumelu-led committee came up with recommendations that was not well-received by his fellow lawmakers. Subsequently, the report was reviewed by a seven-man panel headed by the Deputy Whip of the House, Alhaji Aminu Tambuwal. It is interesting to note that the Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Power, Mr. Ndudi Elumelu, and nine others are facing trial on a 156-count charge over an alleged N5.2bn Rural Electrification Agency contract scam (Ameh and Adeosun, 2009). The twists and turns of the power probe undoubtedly reveals how corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society.

The summary of it all is that the country continues to experience a gradual and steady drop in power generation from the initial mark of about 4,000 MW in 1999 to about 860 MW in May 2008. How has the abysmal power situation arising from corruption in the power sector impacted on the process of economic development in Nigeria? In the section that follows, attempt would be made to sketch dimensions of its impact on economic development in Nigeria.

### **Corruption, Power Supply And Economic (Under)Development In Nigeria**

Reliable electricity supply is vitally important for economic development. For instance, compared to some other African countries like South Africa and Egypt, Nigeria's available power generation capacity with a population of 140 million people stands at 4,5 GW in 2007, whereas South Africa with a population of 40 million generates a capacity of 36 GW and Egypt with a population of 79 million generates 23 GW (Ikediashi 2007:18). This hampers economic development in many ways.

The dismal power generation as a result of corruption in the power sector has led to the closure of many industries and firms in Nigeria, resulting in unemployment, poverty, and increase in crime. Indeed, the centrality of

power supply in economic development of any nation cannot be over-emphasized. As observed by the United Nations (1965:50):

Electrical energy is an important raw material in the electrometallurgical industries and an essential tool in the manufacturing industries by virtue of its versatility and convenience in the use. About two-thirds of the electrical energy generated in the world is used for industrial purposes and has undoubtedly been a major factor contributing to the national prosperity of the advanced countries.

The last few years in Nigeria has witnessed increasing *de-industrialization* and high mortality of all types of enterprises in Nigeria, ranging from large scale, medium scale and small-scale enterprises. The dismal and disrupted power supply essentially as a result corruption in the sector has led to the closure of many industries and enterprises in the country. In Kano, for instance, it has been estimated that more than half of the 400 industrial establishments within the State have been forced to close down due to lack of power (The Guardian, 2008:18). According to Samuel Adebisi, the Group Head, Enterprises Promotion, Small and Medium Enterprises Development of Nigeria (SMEDAN), “recent research findings show that only one out of five businesses started in Nigeria would celebrate its fifth anniversary” (cited in Punch, 2008:14). This implies that only one out of five enterprises survives after five years of operation in Nigeria.

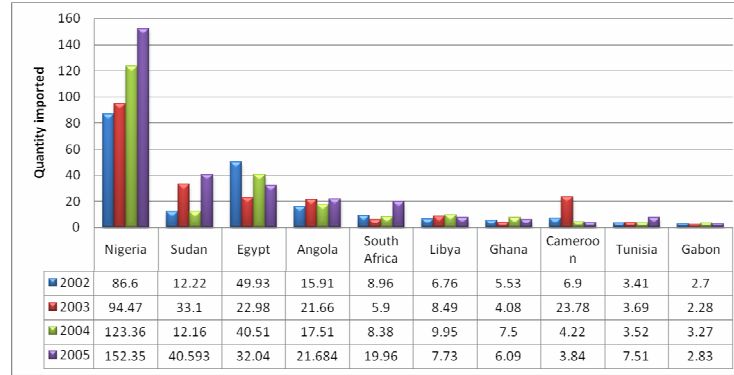
Hence, Nigerians operating or employed in small scale enterprises including barber shops, hair dressing salons, restaurants, super markets, boutiques, block moulding factories, recording studios, dry cleaning services, night clubs, casinos, among others, who depend on electricity for their daily operations have all abandoned their trades for other jobs like commercial motorbike operators to make ends meet. With these closures cascading through the major sectors of the economy, poverty level in the country increases, the unemployment market swells, and the security situation in the country will not but become more tenuous. With rising insecurity and violent crimes in Nigeria, the basic foundations and requirements for economic development also become jeopardised.

In addition to de-industrialization, the energy crisis stifles economic development as every sector of the economy has to rely on generator sets to ensure a continuous power supply. These generator sets come in various size, quality, and prices. The very common and cheapest type, known as Yamaha Tiger brand 950 model, sells for between ₦11,000 and ₦14,000 (naira), depending on the quality. The price of the giant-size generator set used by companies and firms runs into millions of naira. The reliance on generator sets holds double tragedy for the economy.

First, the country expends foreign exchange on their importation since these generator sets are not produced in Nigeria. Available statistics shows that Nigeria is the leading importer of generator sets in Sub-Saharan Africa (see figure 1). In 2005, for instance, Nigeria accounted for over 35 per cent (about US\$152 million) of the 77 per cent share of the UK supplies of generator sets to the African market (Author, 2008a:111).

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**Fig 1:** Top Importing Countries of Diesel Generator Sets in Africa, Ranging from 1 to over 2000KVA



Source: Adapted from African Review of Business and Technology (2006:48)

Secondly, the Nigerian economy loses about \$140 billion (₦16.408, 760 trillion) annually on fuelling the generator sets (Omoh and Igbikiowubo, 2008:5). This however, does not include the cost of oil change, spare parts, routine maintenance, and air pollution with serious health and environmental implications. Recent investigations by *Vanguard* revealed that in the first week of January 2009, Nigerian businesses (15 firms) spent a whopping \$8.2 million (about ₦1.180 billion) on importation of power generating sets (Komolafe, 2009:1&5). As a result of the poor power supply from the nation's public power source which has persisted over the years, almost every households, especially in urban areas of Nigeria have resorted to the use of generator sets. As shown in table 2 below, this explains why residential sector accounts for the highest expenditure on fuelling generator sets.

**Table 2:** Amount of Money Spent Annually in Fuelling Generator Sets in Nigeria

S/No	Sector	Amount in naira (₦)
1	Telecom	6.7 trillion
2	Filling Stations	43.98 billion
3	Factories	191.08 billion
4	Banks	11.7 billion
5	Insurance Companies	80 billion
6	Residential	7.812 trillion
7	Commercial Enterprises	1.57 trillion
<b>Total</b>	-	16.408,760 trillion

Source: Adapted from the report by Omoh and Igbikiowubo (2008:5).

It is worrisome also to note that several deaths resulting from the inhalation of poisonous fume from generator sets has been recorded throughout the

country in recent times. The wrong handling of petroleum products to fuel generators or the malfunctioning of these sets have also led to the death of several people, destruction of properties worth millions of naira and fracturing of family units due to fire incidents (*Daily Trust*, 2009:12; Author, 2008b). Furthermore, noise and poisonous gases (such as carbon monoxide) produced by generator sets are pollutants that are harmful to the environment, contributing to the emission of green house gases that cause global warming and climate change.

Another discernable implication of corruption in the power sector for economic development is its impact on human capital. Human capital is one of the crucial drivers of economic development in any country. Education and health play a vital role in the development of human capital. However, corruption in the power sector generates multiplier effect that impacts on the education sector in Nigeria. For instance, the Vice-Chancellor of the Achiever University, Ondo State, Prof. Johnson Odebiyi, aptly captures the impact of persistent power failure on the education sector when he posited that 'each university in the country spent between ₦120 million and ₦130 million on purchase of diesel for their generating sets'. The result is that 'Nigeria is losing an average of 1,000 highly qualified workers annually to erratic power supply' (cited in *Vanguard*, 2008:9). The opportunity cost is that huge amount of money which is meant for research and manpower development in each of the universities goes into alternative power generation.

Not only is the dismal power supply affecting the educational sector which produces the human capital that initiates and sustains economic development, but it also undermines the functionality of the health sector. In various hospitals across the country, a whole lot of high-tech medical equipment rot away or are underutilized because their utility depends on uninterrupted power supply. This has resulted in a situation where Nigerian hospitals are *corridors of death*, 'leaving medical doctors to complete surgical operations with torch lights' (Tell, 2008:18-29). Consequently, Nigeria continues to lose part of its skilled human capital to avoidable deaths. The overall effect is that economic growth is stunted, and the economy cannot compete in the global market.

### **Combating Corruption in Nigeria: The Radical Approach**

Nigeria, by virtue of its abundant human and natural resource endowment is privileged to rank among the top developed countries of the world. However, the high incidence of corruption in the country is responsible in large measure for most of the negative development indices that characterize Nigeria. The power sector is in no way immune to this cankerworm. In an earlier work (see Author, 2009), I have advanced recommendations that call for the introduction and strengthening of more preventive, punitive and inter-anticorruption cooperative measures to suppress corruption in Nigeria. These recommendations are as apt and apposite as it is inescapable in the present

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study that we reproduced them here with little modification. Set below are some useful suggestions for tackling corruption in the public sector in Nigeria:

- a.) the redefinition of corruption to be in categories measured in terms of its economic costs to the nation such as *low*, *medium*, *high* and *very serious*, in a manner that attracts more harsh and stiff penalty;
- b.) the removal of all clauses or provisions in the nation's statute books which trivialize the fight against corruption, such as plea bargaining; the unnecessary use of prerogative of mercy by Governors or the President to secure freedom for their cronies; or the unjustifiable granting of *soft* punishment as in the case of six months jail term for an Inspector General of Police (IGP) convicted of embezzling over ₦17 billion;
- c.) the strengthening of anti-corruption institutions and other initiatives (such as the EFCC, ICPC, Due Process, NEITI; and passage of the Freedom of Information Bill), to deepen the fight against corruption;
- d.) the implementation of a new framework to ensure accountability and transparency in the public sector in the form of Nigerian Public Sector Transparency and Accountability Initiative (NPSTAI) to subject the public sector to more scrutiny by the civil society;
- e.) the need for a radical paradigm shift in legislative oversight of the executive from arm-chair monitoring of the budget to routinised fieldtrips and on-the-spot assessment of all projects approved for implementation in annual budgets; and
- f.) the development of a robust framework that could enhance greater cooperation among anti-corruption agencies at the local, national, regional and international levels to prevent, detect and punish corrupt practices.

### **CONCLUSION**

We have attempted in this discourse to briefly sketch the relationship between corruption and economic development in Nigeria, with particular reference to the power sector in the last eight years of democratic politics. The paper has posited that corruption undermines economic development in Nigeria. Its impacts manifest in the form of de-industrialisation, exacerbation of poverty and unemployment, undermining of the development and supply of human capital, among others. It is concluded that Nigeria's ambition of joining the twenty largest world economies in the year 2020 can only be realized if the fight against corruption is given the serious attention that it deserves.

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