



Corruption and Development in Nigeria: Matters Arising

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the link between corruption and development, using a contextual analysis of the Nigerian experience from Independence (1960) to this present day (2010). It conceptualizes corruption as “putrefaction, tainting, debasement, perversion or venality, spoiling, destruction of purity or falling away from standard of integrity or rectitude defined by law, upheld by social norms or conscience or recognized by the general conscience of mankind. It discovers the pervasiveness of corruption in all the various administration of the country military and civilian alike. Corruption is an albatross in the wheel of the country’s development. The paper argues that given the kid gloves with which corruption is treated in Nigeria every development effort will continue to fail and Nigeria will die if the necessary steps are not taking. Corruption is therefore anti-developmental because all the indices of development are affected negatively by it. As a way forward the paper recommends attitudinal change of the people, aggressive campaign against corruption, rebranding of the anti-graft agencies and an independent judiciary.

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon and the destination of corruption in Nigeria have been beset with a sense of hopelessness and pessimism, while the prospects of a successful war against it is greeted with cynicism. Nwankwo (2001) cited in Felix (2006), states that “The Nigerian socio-political landscape brims with stories of scandals and squandering of our wealth by those in authority. Chief Adolphus Wabara a one time senator, in his chat with journalists, stated that “corruption is a household thing. There is virtually no Nigerian who is not corrupt. The entire nation is corrupt.” The above tend to complement Achebe (1983) assertion that, “keeping an average Nigerian from being corrupt is like keeping a goat from eating yam.” What a sorry state for Nigerians and our

Corruption and Development in Nigeria

beloved country. This pervasive practice amounts to subversion of self by self, the archetype of our predicament (Felix 2006).

Nwankwo (2001) cited by Felix (2006) aptly captured this ugly scene thus:

Nigerian has continued to lumber aimlessly like a behemoth, charting an unknown course at the end of which we may harvest the ruins of a nation destined for greatness but destroyed by a senseless circle of human stupidity, and buffoonery propelled by mindless looting, corruption and unprecedented thieves. Corruption has bereft our sense of reasoning and we have lost focus, hence we can only gravitate endlessly in material poverty and moral decadence p. 70.

Fifty years as an independent state, Nigeria is still wallowing in the cesspool of corruption in both public and private sectors. Chigbo (2010) lamenting about the pervasive nature of corruption put it thus;

Corruption is so pervasive because when you come to an office, a messenger will ask you what do you have for me. At check point, the police will ask what do you have for me. If you call an artisan to work for you, he will inflate the cost. It is a vicious circle p15.

Ngige cited by Chigbo (2010) unveil other dimensions of corruption as follows:

The spate of robbery and kidnapping in the country is as a result of corruption by people who cannot find a place to indulge in financial corruption. The militancy in the Niger Delta and other places is a revolt and all part of the general corruption with the attendant breakdown of law and order. Security of life is no longer guaranteed. It is a sad story for Nigeria, p16.

It is indeed a sad story for Nigeria, because an ailment (corruption) which was diagnosed at a very early stage of our independence has over the years developed not only into an open wound but one which has now been infested, festering, and cancerous. The chances of surviving are rather slim, if not impossible. The opinion of this paper, is that given the festering and cancerous nature of the ailment (corruption), and the debilitating condition of the patient (Nigerian development). There is every tendency that she will die going by the kid gloves with which the ailment is treated.

The paper is divided into seven sections. Immediately after the introduction, is section two which dwells on conceptual issues. Section three x-rays the origin of corruption, while section four examines some cases of corruption in Nigeria. Section five discusses corruption and development in

Nigeria, section six is the concluding remarks while section seven is the recommendation.

Conceptual Issues

Attempt at providing a generally acceptable definition of the phenomenon “corruption” have defied a consensus. This may be attributed to the fact that the phenomenon is multifaceted and that some of the approaches at defining it have be discriminative or rather very hasty. It is like the attempts made by a group of blind men at describing an elephant. Each described the animal from his angle of touch (Felix 2006).

Nye (1967) defined corruption as “any act by a public official who violates the accepted standard of behaviour in order to serve private or selfish ends”. In the same vein, Akani (2001) cited in Felix (2006) defined corruption as the abuse of public position for private or sectional gain. The above definitions suggest that public officials alone are involved in corruption. This is a parochial definition of corruption. For example is a roadside mechanic or a bricklayer a “public official.” Limiting corruption to public officials alone would thwart the efforts of dealing with such a cancerous disease in our society as corruption (Felix 2006).

According to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, corruption is simply a “dishonest, illegal, or immoral behaviour, especially from someone with power. The question begging for an answer here is, can an action be deemed corrupt because it is illegal or immoral? As Chuta (2004), put it, does the violation of any of the Ten Commandments amount to corruption? Definitely no, what then is corruption? Felix (2006) defined corruption as “the perversion or deviation from standard of integrity or uprightness defined by law or recognized by mankind. The paper tends to be inclined to Olugbekan (2001) definition of corruption. He defines corruption as:

Putrefaction, tainting, debasement, perversion or venality, spoiling, destruction of purity or failing away from standard of integrity or rectitude defined by law, upheld by social norms or conscience or recognized by the general conscience of mankind P.3.

Next on line is development. The concept of development is a rather complex one and has had its varied interpretations by the various schools of thought in the social sciences. This paper adopts the definition of development as given by Akpakpan (1987) and Wilson (2002). They define development qualitatively as a process of improvements in the general welfare of the entire society, usually manifested in desirable changes in the various aspects of the life of the society. Such changes are:

Corruption and Development in Nigeria

- (i) a reduction in the level of unemployment,
- (ii) a reduction in the extent of personal and regional inequalities,
- (iii) a reduction in the level of absolute poverty,
- (iv) a rise in real output of goods and services and improvements in techniques of production,
- (v) improvements in literacy, health services, housing conditions and government services,
- (vi) improvements in the level of social and political consciousness of the people,
- (vii) greater ability to draw on local resources (human and material) to meet local needs (self reliance); and
- (viii) a reduction in pollution and/or environmental degradation.

The choice for this definition is that it is more encompassing and most of the indices are measurable or observable.

Origin of Corruption

The Bible provides us with some information and vital background to investigate what could be the origin of corruption. Rebecca, in collusion with Jacob her son, through deceitful way succeeded in snatching the blessing that rightly belonged to his elder brother Esau.

And Rebeka took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son. And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck ... And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father, and he felt him, and said. The voice is Jacob's voice but the hands are the hands of Esau. And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hand, so he blessed him (Genesis chapter 27 verses 15 to 23. Authorized King James Version).

This corrupt nature of Jacob trickled down to his descendants (children of Israel). Moses captured vividly the corrupt nature of the Israelites as follows:

They have, corrupted themselves; their spot is not the spot of his children: they are a perverse and crooked generation (Deuteronomy Chapter 32 verses).

Incidentally, it was also among the nations around Israel that was experienced a prototype of corruption through deceit, hatched, contrived and executed in order to again undue advantage, which today, in Nigeria, has been tagged "419". A distinguishing feature of this form of corruption is that

Jebbin Maclean Felix and Good Wilson

both the fool, the most intelligent and the most spiritual can be taken in by its gimmicks (Chuta 2004). This is evident by the association between the Israelites and the Gibeonites.

The Gibeonites inhabited a near-neighbourhood with itinerant Israel, and was the next possible city of invasion. They sent their delegates in crafty manner for a peace pact as to avert the invasion. The men (delegates) put on worn-out and patched sandals and wore old cloths. All the bread they carried was dry and mouldy (Joshua 9:4-6). The appearance of the delegates was designed to deceive Joshua into believing that they had traveled many days from a distant place. This they pressed on following their interrogation by Joshua. "We are your servant" they explained thus:

Make a treaty with us. This bread of our was warm when we packed it at home on the day we left to come to you. But now see how dry and mouldy it is. And these wine skins that we filled were new, but see how cracked they are. And our clothes and sandals are worn out by the very long journey. (Joshua, chapter 9 verses 11 to 13).

Having heard the sad account of their journey as narrated by the delegates, Joshua not only believed them but also partook of the corruption in the food that the Gibeonites had come with. That eating together became a token of an unalterable amicable relationship and a permanent covenant. And thus:

Joshua made peace with them (the Gibeonites) and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them (Joshua Chapter 9 verse 15).

It was after three days journey when the Israelites came into the city of Gibeon that they discovered to their chagrin that the Gibeonites were neighbours and not distant sojourners as they make them to believed. However it was too late to reverse the terms of the league entered into.

On account of this, Israel did not invade Gibeon as they should base on the Gibeonites successful deception (419). They contrived and executed evil that good may come their way.

Two other archetypes of corruption that need mentioning during the monarchy in Israel are, the case of king David and Jezebel, Ahab's wife. At a time when "Kings go forth to battle," Israel was engaged in a military campaign against Ammon, under the command of Joab. David, the King of Israel at the time, "tarried still at Jerusalem" (second Samuel chapter 11 verse 1). As he strolled on his housetop, he sighted Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, bathing. As he set his eyes on her, he saw she was beautiful, and began to lust for her. Using his position as a king, he sent for her, and got her seduced. Having tried and failed at covering up the sinful act, he plotted and had Uriah

Corruption and Development in Nigeria

killed at the warfront. He then took Bathsheba as his wife (second Samuel chapter 11 verses 1 to 27).

Next, it the case of Jezebel, Ahab's wife. Ahab was a king in Israel, and happened to have admired Naboth's vineyard, located close to his palace in Jezreel. Ahab approached Naboth for exchange of that vineyard with another vineyard somewhere else but Naboth refused. On hearing about Naboth's refusal to surrender his ancestral piece of land to her husband (Ahab), Jezebel plotted and had Naboth killed. Ahab, thereafter took possession of Naboth's vineyard (First Kings chapter 21 verses 1 to 26).

The two cases cited above are archetypes of corruption because both of them sprang from the root causes of corruption namely, covetousness and lack of contentment. The list is unending but because of space constraint, we end it here.

CORRUPTION: THE CASE OF NIGERIA

This section undertakes a pathological x-ray of corruption in Nigeria. To make for ease of understanding of the magnitude of corruption in the country, the paper x-rays the various corrupt practices in all the republics and regimes in our 50 years as an independent state.

Corruption in the First Republic: 1960-1966

The level of corruption that was prominent during the first republic was the undisguised personal enrichment by political office holders. Some of the ministers neither made pretences nor minced words about their ill-gotten wealth. During a parliamentary debate, the then Federal Representative and Minister of Aviation, Dr. K. O. Mbadiwe, had been asked where he got the money he used to build his stone mansion in his hometown. The minister replied, "sources known and unknown". (Chuta 2004). On his part, the Minister of Finance, Chief Festus Okotie Eboh, responding to the charger of accumulation of wealth by government officers, quoted from the Bible. "To those that have, more shall be given (Chuta, 2004). It was during the first republic that the maxim, "you scratch my back, I scratch your back," was coined to justify the flagrant use of bribery, inducement, and kill-backs as modes of private enrichment. Among Nigerian traditional rulers, the story was no less dismal drawing from Ademoyegu (1981) heart strobbling cement that:

The posts of Obas, Emirs and Amayanabos constituted the greatest anachronisms in the Nigerian society of 1965. The natural rulers were useful instruments of corruption and compromise, first under the British and later under the

Jebbin Maclean Felix and Good Wilson

Nigerian politicians ... (they) served as conduits to pass bribe to the people in order to miscarry social justices, p.45.

It was greeted with a great fanfare when Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu successfully hoisted out the first republic in 15th January, 1996. the rationale for the coup d'etat was "the corrupt practices of the political class at both federal and regional levels. Crowther (1966) described the horrible situation thus:

By the end of 1965, the politicians had earned also universal contempt for their corruption, profligacy, and lack of real concern for those they ruled and who had elected them p.260.

Corruption in the First Military Regime (1966-75).

There were obvious cases of corruption and lack of accountability in Gowon's regime. Gowon's greatest weakness was that he was not as good as his word on the issue of handing over as he had earlier promised. Murtala over thrown his government in 1975. He probed his regime and found all the 12 military governors that served with him guilty of corrupt enrichment except Mobolaji Johnson of Lagos State and Oluwole Rotimi of Western State (Tell 2010).

Corruption in the Second Military Regime 1975-1979

General Murtala launched an aggressive and ruthless attack against corruption which had devastated Gowon's regime for nine years. He set a record by being the first Nigerian leader, who forfeited his ill-gotten wealth to the nation before carrying his war against corruption. However, his regime was short lived and General Olusegun Obasanjo took over the mantle of leader and could not carry the war against corruption with vigour, because he was also corrupt.

Corruption in the Second Republic (1979-83)

Corrupt practices, graft, lack of accountability by the political class and patrons greatly made a mockery of the Ethical Revolution, instituted by the administration. It was in this regime that the Audit Department of the Abuja Development Authority and the Nigerian External Telecommunications were razed down with fire in 1983 in order to cover up the embezzlement of millions of naira in those establishments. Corruption became so pervasive that the sum of N200 million supplementary allocations to a state government, for payment of outstanding salaries arrears embezzled, was dismissed simple

Corruption and Development in Nigeria

as owing to “change of hands.” Okadigbo (1987) gave a summary of the profile of corruption in Nigeria during the regime thus;

The corrupt man is everywhere, the man on the street, the man next door, the man in the church, or Mosque, the man in the market, or the department store, the police on beat petrol, the soldier at the checkpoint. P 137.

Corruption was so rampant, that the Khaki boys (military) had to intervene and terminated the regime. Ademolekun (1985) described the situation thus:

The actions of the government over which Alhaji Shagari presided contradicted everything that was ethical and the moral tone of the society was at its lowest level ever, p. 105.

Corruption in the Third Military Regime 1983-1985:

This regime proved, to some extent, to be a reformist regime as not much was heard of the usual undisguised and indiscriminate looting of public funds. However the regime was not completely immune from corruption because of the case of 52 suitcases that was ferried into the country circumventing customs at the port. There were also newspaper reports on bribery, cocaine pushing, and robbery by violence.

Corruption in the Fourth Military Regime (1985-1993)

Abubakar (1997) in assessing the eight years tenure of General Babangida has this to say:

The Babangida years are historic because they marked the beginning of the institutionalization of authoritarianism, intensification of prebendist tendencies, patronage, and corruption within the state apparatuses. P. 99.

He was unable to account for \$12.4 billion Gulf War Oil Windfall. This and the killing of Dele Giwa have been major plights to his regime.

Corruption in the Fifth Military Regime (1993-1998)

Abacha Regime was noted to have occupied the worst place in terms of corruption in Nigerian history. The record of corruption which surrounded him, his family connections and his supporters submerged whatever returns corruption may have accumulated in the wider society. Without mincing

Jebbin Maclean Felix and Good Wilson

words corruption has a free ride in Abacha's regime. Newswatch magazine (2010) gave the account of his ill-gotten money recovered by his successor Abdulsalmi Abubakar as follows:

N64 billion illegally taken out of the security vote by Abacha.
A total of \$2 billion being part of N2.5 billion owned a
Russian firm which built Ajaokuta steel company was stolen
by members of Abacha family. P.15.

Despite all these recovery, Abdulsalmi Regime is not also corruption free, judging by the way and manner and the speed with which he depleted the country's national reserve from \$7.1 billion to \$3.1 billion within six months he was in office without commensurate infrastructural development to show for it.

Corruption in the Third Republic 1999-

Obasanjo resurfaced again as the number one citizen in the third republic. Probably based on his first experience in the country's leadership that terminate 1979 about the ills of corruption. He poured out his heart on his mission to deal with corruption, on his national broadcast to the nation on 1st October 2002, cited by Chuta (2004) as follows;

To condone corruption is not only unpatriotic, but also irreligious for Christians and Muslims alike. No excuse is good enough for condoning the evil of corruption, be it on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sectional interest or in the offering of inducement in order to wield undue influence and pervert the truth. Corruption is an immoral and unpardonable act against society and punishable by God. The wholesomeness of our society is the responsibility of all of us. This administration will not relent nor leave any stone unturned in the war against the evil of the corruption in our society, p 37.

To the chagrin of all and sundry, Obasanjo's administration was crowded with tales of corruption. He purchased a greater percent of Transcorp shares; other allegation was the misappropriation of Petroleum Development Trust Fund. In his war against corruption, double standards was applied with the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independence Corruption Practices Commission (ICPC) going after mostly perceived enemies of the government (Obasanjo) while cronies were left alone.

Corruption and Development: The Nigerian setting

In examining corruption and development in the Nigerian setting, there is need for us to once again point out the indices of development as enshrined

Corruption and Development in Nigeria

in Akpakpan (1987) and Wilson (2002) conceptualization of development. This will help explain in clear terms the subversion of development process by the impact of corruption. These indices are (i) a reduction in the level of unemployment, (ii) a reduction in the extent of personal and regional inequalities, (iii) a reduction in the level of absolute poverty (iv) improvements in literacy, health services, housing conditions and government services, (v) improvements in the level of social and political consciousness of the people, (vi) a reduction in the rate of pollution/environment degradation etc. We shall take each in turns as we examine how corruption subverted it.

Corruption has helped to increase the unemployment rate in the country rather than reducing it, by making public investment more costly and lower resources surpluses. This is vividly captured by Miquel Schloss, the Executive Director of Transparency International, in his address at a three-day. Eight Nigerian Economic summits, held in Abuja in 2001 thus;

Bribery and corruption not only create room for more costly public investment, low government revenues, low expenditure on operation and maintenance but also make for lower resource surpluses. All these can only engender poorer economic performance. And Nigeria is a classical example of one country whose economy has continued to stagnate because the spectre of bribery and corruption continued to haunt it.

A country whose economy continued to stagnate but population continues to increase at the rate of 2.8 percent annually automatically will record higher rate of unemployment and this is the situation in Nigeria. Achebe (1983) view tends to complement that of Miquel Schloss with regard to projects contract. He posits;

a huge hidden element of kickbacks and commissions to Nigeria middlemen ... it carries inflated prices of materials caused largely by corruption, theft and inefficiency on the site fostered by more corruption; contract variation, corruptly arranged midstream in execution; an inflated margin (or more aptly corridor) of profit p.48

He further speculates that;

Nigeria could build two more international airports like Murtala Mohammed airport in Lagos; or if we are not keen on more airports, the money could buy us three refineries; or build us a dual express motor way from the Lagos to Kaduna, or pay the salaries of 10,000 workers on grade level 01 for forty years p.39.

Without mincing words it is obvious that corruption deplete resources that can be engaged in meaningful productive activities that will generate employment for our youths. Hence corruptions help to increase the level of unemployment in the country crude yes.

Corruption tends to skew the distribution of the country's wealth in the direction of the few privilege office holders through the instrumentality of the state. Political activity is directed toward personal enrichment through corruption. It is the few corrupt that occupy the political offices, hence they acquired more wealth, while the masses are impoverished thus wildering the inequality gap.

Corruption worsens the poverty situation in Nigeria, the National Bureau of Statistics NBS (2008) estimated the poverty incidence to be 78.30 percent. Akanbi (2001) stated inter alia;

Corruption is a dangerous foe ... The endemic nature and debilitating effect of corruption on the cultural, economic, social, and political foundation of the society has been most harrowing and disconcerting. Corruption is, indeed, the bane of our society. It has been the harbinger of the messy situation in which we find ourselves today. Our economy has been ruined, our hopes for greater tomorrow have been dashed, our value system is destroyed so much so that the world begin to see us as men and women without honour and dignity P.1.

What a hopeless situation; the harrowing and disconcerting effect of corruption is the wide spread of poverty in the midst of plenty.

Corruption brings about increasing rate of illiteracy, poor health services, poor housing conditions and poor government services. These are directly the opposite of what development stands for. The Sunday Sun (2003) in its own editorial wrote about corruption in Nigeria as follows:

Corruption has eaten so deep into Nigeria's economy and body politic that it threatens the entire edifice. The craze for wealth and the flagrant disregard for established processes as well as for values of labour and just rewards are mere systems of the monster. At the federal, state and local government levels, and in nearly ever crevice of the private sector, corruption has become embedded, (Sunday Sun Newspaper March, 9 (2003).

Corruption is embedded in every sphere of the country's life the government and private sectors alike. Nothing seems to work, hence systemic failure manifested by increased rate of illiteracy, poor conditions of government services, health etc. Corruption has depleted the much needed resources that

Corruption and Development in Nigeria

would have been channel into these areas as to revamp them. Hospitals are without the much needed equipment and materials, thus they are glorified clinics. In our schools, primary, secondary, and tertiary, the condition is even worst as a result of incessant strike actions and lack of basic amenities. There has been a total decay of infrastructural facilities in the country.

Corruption dampens the social and political consciousness of the people. Sunday Sun (2003) in its editorial wrote on the pervasiveness of the corruption disease thus:

That the country finds itself today at the edge of a precipice is the result of the corruption of power... elections are rigged routinely (Sunday Sun Newspaper, March 9, 2003:6).

The above situation breeds lack of trust in government and government policies. The people discovered that hardwork no longer pays, rather what pays is connection to the corrupt power that be. They also discovered that their vote do not account, hence they developed apathy. The attendant consequence is the dampen of the social and political consciousness of the people.

Increase in the rate of environmental pollution and degradation is a product of the corrupt leaders we have. They corruptly enrich themselves from the heinous activities of the multinational corporations, hence the laxity in enforcing them to obey environmental laws. Thus the multinational corporations practice double standards.

CONCLUSION

The pervasiveness of corruption in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. The situation is so bleak that Anyoka (2001) lamented thus;

I wonder how many of our public office holders including those who official position entitle them to use the epithet "Honourable", can truly be said to be men and women of honour in their everyday conduct. I wonder too, how many of our people in leadership position in our private sectors and non governmental organizations can be said to reflect a sense of personal honour in what they do p.12.

Corruption is an albatross which has continually remained a log in the wheel of the country's development. Given the kid gloves with which corruption is treated in Nigeria, every developmental effort will continue to fail, and Nigeria will die if necessary steps are not taking. All the indices of development are affected negatively by corruption; therefore corruption in the Nigerian setting is anti-development. The conclusion is in line with

Achebe (1983) view cited in Felix (2006) he lamented that “corruption has reached the alarming stage and entered the fatal and critical stages and that Nigeria will die if we keep pretending that she is slightly indisposed.

RECOMMENDATION

As a way out the following recommendations are put forward. First, there should be attitudinal change, we should not sacrifice dignity of labour on the alter of money. There should be an aggressive public enlightenment campaign on the negative consequences of corruption. As many as are convicted of corruption, their properties and money should be confiscated and they should be sentence to a minimum of 20 years imprisonment. The various anti-graft commissions should be re-branded and independent of the federal government undue influence. Lastly there should be an independent judiciary in place.

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Corruption and Development in Nigeria

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