

Corruption in the Nigerian Public Sector

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Abstract: The ills of corruption in governance and public management creates an oddity of interests between leaderships and citizens. The myriads of challenges confronting many developing economies in the world today stems from corruption and the lack of transparency in governance. The elegance ascribed to political and economic corruptions in most African states stems not only from the depraved self-seeking nature of the individuals, but also from a societal expectation of grandeur and affluence after a successful political or bureaucratic career. The Nigerian state is evidently ethno-centric and blessed with abundant natural mineral resources. However, there are several factors fostering corruption in Nigeria, and this includes the rampant lack of accountability in governance, poor political leadership, and an ill-informed system of governance. For the Nigerian state to be free from corruption therefore, a lot needs to be done towards encouraging transparency in governance, responsible and an accountable political leadership, citizen participation in governance and an established system of informed policy formulation, exemplary leadership hinged on the tenets of morality, and the re-engineering of the social construct towards the re-building of trust between leaderships and the citizens. This review takes a critical look at corruption in the Nigerian public sector, and also offers some vital suggestions on how to overcome this protracted challenge.

Key Words: Governance, Corruption, Ethics, Morality, Accountability, Transparency

I. INTRODUCTION

Corruption is the depravity of public trust and power for personal gains and self-aggrandizement. Corruption is universal, and its dynamics are fueled by the greed and selfish nature inherent in humans. When greed and selfishness is allied with power and trust without taming or discipline, a misnomer of interests ensued with the anomalous eccentricities of wanton excesses. Corruption is a huge burden that has remained the bane of development and growth in many countries in the 21st century (Fitzsimons, 2002; Ryan, 2000). Corruption has remained the cause of many social unrest and the singular factor responsible for the increased rate of armed conflicts around the world today. The lack of social cohesion and the social-political unrest engendered by corruption has remained a major barrier to economic development and a hindrance to Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in most affected countries (Ugur & Dasgupta, 2011). The ills of corruption are also responsible for the skewed allocation of available resources and the lack of provision of basic social amenities such as pipe borne water, good road networks, stable electricity supplies, standard healthcare facilities, good wage structures, well-equipped security agencies and apparatus, and well-funded and well-equipped educational institutions. Corruption destroys societies and

economies, and it hinders entrepreneurship and social development.

Corruption is endemic in many developing countries especially in many developing African states such as Nigeria (Olivier de Sardan, 1999). Corruption is a systemic problem within the Nigerian polity. The lofty dreams, hopes and aspirations of the founding fathers of the Nigerian state has been defaced with the incessant and wanton nature of corruption at all levels of leadership and public governance. Successive governments and political leaderships in Nigeria have made frantic efforts at fighting the canker of corruption within the Nigerian polity, but the more efforts they made, the more the country goes deeper into the labyrinth of despotism, financial fraud, money laundering, bribery, extortion, rent seeking, and political aneurism (Mbaku, 1996). In a political state where each successive government sees nothing good or commendable in the socio-economic and infrastructural achievements of their predecessors, but rather embarking on new white elephant projects and social agendas, there abound myriads of abandoned projects that would have brought meaningful progress to the entire polity. Leadership and governance in the management of the common resources of states is meant to bring the citizens and their leaders together, but when leadership and governance becomes a show of mediocrity, fraudulent practices, and sheer incompetence, a disparaging discontent from the citizens ensued.

The sad case of the Nigerian state stems not only from the ethno-centric dichotomy within its constituent tribes and languages, but also from the failure of leadership, partisanship, and the lack of ethical values. In a country where public office holders embezzles public funds and defrauds the entire polity at will, it is no wonder that the Transparency International (TI) has consistently rated Nigeria as one of the most corrupt countries in the world (TI, 2020). The lack of public accountability in Nigeria has made corruption a malignant tumor of which metastases has decapitated the entire organs and structures of governance. In addition, the weakened penal code and the waned political will to punishing corrupt practices has heightened the astronomical growth of corruption at all levels of government in Nigeria (Ibietan, 2013). The utility of greed and self-gain by the vital stakeholders within the Nigerian polity has remained one of the hindering factors to true national development and unity. This review seeks to address the issue of corruption within the Nigerian public sector, and to proffering possible solutions to overcoming this chronic challenge. Corruption has eaten deep into the Nigerian system, and with each passing day, the harsh economic realities occasioned by the cancer of corruption

keeps telling on the citizens. Thus, it is high time the Nigerian state retrace its steps in both its political leadership structures and styles, and in the management and distribution of its common resources.

II. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption hinders both social, economic, and political growth; and it is the main factor impeding national development (Rotimi, et al. 2013). The marauding canker of corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society, so much that the youth and young people are now hoping to someday get their own share of the “national cake” without care as to the destructive path the country is headed (Chi-Chi & Ebimobwei, 2012). As a country blessed with abundant natural and mineral resources, Nigeria is meant to be the pride of Africa in both land mass, human population, economic and political might, and social-political influence among the committee of African states and nations; but that dream now seem forlorn as a result of persistent corruption. Varied factors encourages corruption within the Nigerian state, and the lack of abatement of these anomalous factors is responsible for the pervasive and persistent spate of corruption in Nigeria. The lack of ethical disciplines in leadership and public administration has occasioned the mismanagement and persistent plundering of public funds and resources meant for the common good within the Nigerian polity.

Ethics and Morality in Governance

The role of ethics in guiding individuals, organizations, institutions, and governments in their rules of engagements, and in engendering popular goodwill within a polity is within the limit of reason. Public Service as the name implies involves the rendering of public services to people within an entire community (Denherdt & Denherdt, 2002). Because of the enormous nature of these popular tasks, governments and public office holders are saddled with these noble responsibilities. In order to effecting these services however, resources are required, which is why governments are allowed to use the resources of states in carrying out public services (Hudgins & Poole, 2014). In the utilization of a common state resources therefore, accountability, following due processes and the rules of law, and transparency in governance and management are all required (Kaler, 2002). The bane of many developing Democratic states like Nigeria is the lack of transparency in governance and political leaderships (Adebayo, 2014). This secrecy has led to massive corrupt practices with no regards to ethical and moral rectitude, but self-profiteering with lavish lifestyles supported by stolen public resources. Varied forms of corruption in the forms of nepotism, bribery, extortion, influence peddling, rent-seeking, lobbying, fraud, tax evasion, favoritism and embezzlement of public funds exists ‘(Morris, 2011) within the Nigerian state; a country currently ranked 146/180 on the Transparency International “Corruption Perception Index

(CPI)” (TI, 2020). Ethics and morality are two arbiters that sway people on the path of right. However, when a people or society debunk these arbiters on the altar of personal gains and self-aggrandizement, corruption ensued, and the demeaning nature of corruption is such that it takes away the dignity of people and of societies.

III. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

The Nature of Corruption in Nigeria.

Myriads of theories have been propounded as to explaining the challenge with the persistent and endemic corruption in Nigeria. Many Nigerian political leaders who have attempted at redirecting the Nigerian state on the path of transparency, accountability and justice have all been frustrated without success. Thus, there seem to be more people in governance who desires that the polity continue on the downward spiral of corruption and corrupting influences. Some of the theories that have been used to explaining the sorry state of corruption in Nigeria include the theory of the Two Publics, Clientelism, Patrimonialism, Prebendalism, Soft State Thesis, and Neopatrimonialism (Ogundiya, 2009). Other theories that have been used to explain the tragedy of corruption in Nigeria include the theories of the Resource Curse, the Idealistic, the Low-risk High-benefit theory, and the Anomie theories (Ijewereme, 2015). The theoretical frameworks of these theories have largely helped in understanding the basis for this disease called corruption in Nigeria (Ogundiya, 2009); and because wealth is seen as the measures of success in most African societies, the enormity of bureaucratic corruption and its pathological effects has overwhelmingly drowned the society that encourages it in the first place. When we look critically at the insidious nature of corruption in Nigeria, where corruption has hindered the national growth for about 60 years, it will be right to say that the weak Nigerian penal code and the possibility of Low-risk High-benefit is what has remained the motivating factors encouraging corrupt individuals and practices within the Nigerian state.

Factors Fostering Corruption in Nigeria

The many challenges of the Nigerian state of which corruption is the topmost is both **resource-driven and non-resource driven**. Right from the foundation of the Nigerian state, ethnic and cultural dichotomy already exists, with fragmented regional political institutions and financially weakened geopolitical zones (Mahler, 2010). The advent of the oil boom in Nigeria opened up the economy of the country, and as more financial independence was gained from the colonial masters, so does the ideology for the frugal management of resources and public funds gradually disappears. The discovery of natural resources that brings in more financial wealth into the country encourages the development of the once neglected parts of the country. Citizens from whose geopolitical zones these resources were sourced grew bolder as to demanding equitable representation in the national polity and a fair share of the incomes generated from their traded resources. With

both evident and perceived neglect and lack of development, the people grew bolder and more violent in their demands and desire for autonomy and resource control (Mahler, 2010). Corrupt politicians with no plans or desires for progress or development taking advantage of the people's agitations sprung up; inciting the citizens and capitalizing on the dissatisfaction engendered by poor governance and bad leaderships. The abundant resources in Nigeria has fueled the greed of selfish and self-seeking politicians and rent seekers towards destabilizing the polity for their personal interests and gains. Many armed conflict groups have arisen in Nigeria, purportedly sponsored and controlled by corrupt politicians (Iwuoha, 2019). Thus whatever these enemies of state can do to draining more funds out of the coffers of government and the entire Nigerian state, they will do. They usually will stop at nothing to devising endless strategies at distracting the state and the citizens from their evil schemes and agendas. Many of these enemies of the Nigerian state are involved in oil pipeline bunkering and the illegal refining and sales of crude oil to foreign buyers (Orogun, 2010; Osaghae, et al. 2011; Ukiwo, 2007).

The non-resource driven factors influencing corruption in Nigeria largely involve the lack of accountability in governance, political leadership and public management. Public office holders without recourse to justice or the rule of law brazenly embezzle available public resources and funds. The lenient penal code in the country also encourages corruption. Development and progress in Nigeria have been largely unsustainable due to the overarching influence of corruption at all levels of public leadership in the country (Mohammed, 2013). Different contextual factors like ethnic dichotomy and societal expectations serves as motivating factors for corrupt practices. Adenugba and Omolawal, (2014) argued that religion has failed in its role at correcting the inherent nature of corruption in humans as a result of the commercialization of spiritual and moral values within the Nigerian state. The lack of transparency in public management, the low wage and remuneration given to public servants or workers in Nigeria, and the sheer impunity with which high profile public office holders embezzles public funds are all factors fostering corrupt practices in Nigeria. Inuwa, et al. (2019), has also elucidated on the use of Information Systems (IS) for the perpetration of corrupt practices in the 21st century. Corruption erodes the trust that citizens have in leaderships, and it demeans programs and policies aimed at building societies. The inequity of corruption is such that it disproportionately affects the poor, leaving them with a government that has no respect for social contract (Rose-Ackerman, 1997).

Politics is the most lucrative business in Nigeria today. Many people with no political trainings, education or mentorship have delve into becoming politicians because that is the only job that can guarantee free monies without work, efforts or accountability (Joseph, 2014). Hordes of sycophants

parade themselves daily as entourage to corrupt politicians who must maintain their aggrandizement with more stolen public funds. Most young people no longer believe in morality or the tenets of moral rectitude as their role models are those who can become multi-billionaires within months of joining politics (Albert, 2005). Civil Servants who are poorly remunerated are often forced to finding other illegal and corrupt means of making ends meet. The social construct of corruption in Nigeria cuts across all facets of government and public establishments including the educational institutions, healthcare institutions, the armed and paramilitary forces, the civil defense agencies, ministerial agencies and parastatals, the various arms of government; and not excluding the private sectors and non-governmental organizations. Corruption is a heavy burden recognized by all in Nigeria. In addition, the nature and manner in which it is being perpetrated with sheer indifference is of major concern to all well-meaning Nigerians. Corruption leads not in the path to greatness, but it tends only to redundancy and a beggarly polity.

Efforts at Fighting Corruption in Nigeria.

In a bid to fighting corruption and stemming its rampaging impact on the Nigerian economy and socio-political landscape, successive governments in Nigeria have made frantic efforts at establishing different anti-corruption agencies. Of note among these anti-graft agencies of government are the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB), which was established to help regulate the code of ethics among civil servants in the country. The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), which was specifically established to help fight corruption within the Nigerian public service. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which was also established to fighting corruption within the Nigerian polity; and the Service Compatible with All Nigerians (SERVICOM), which was established to help curb the incessant rate of indiscipline among civil servants in the country (Amaefule & Umeaka, 2016). At a point under the current regime in Nigeria, Whistle Blowers were encouraged to revealing corrupt public officials and wherever they might have hidden the stolen public funds, with the promise of cash rewards; a few citizens tried revealing the identities of corrupt public office holders but these were all strategically intimidated, threatened, and shut down. Various Acts and promulgations of government back these agencies of government. However, despite the presence of these agencies, corruption still pervades the entire Nigerian polity without abatement. One major effort of importance however is the introduction of the Cashless Policy across all Nigerian states; this corruption control measure is encouraging as it could help in reducing the rate of money laundering in the country (Ayoola, 2013). In order for corruption to be duly eradicated from Nigeria, potent measures must be taken at punishing offenders. Longer jail terms for corrupt practices must be instituted and all ill-gotten wealth must be confiscated and returned to government (Ogbeidi, 2012). In addition,

measures at penalizing government officials, corrupt judges and security officials must be instituted and implemented.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Corruption is a burden and a hindrance to the progress and development of countries where it is found (Adesina, 2016; Sadiq & Abdullahi, 2013). Yet, while efforts are being made at fighting corruption at different levels, such efforts will remain futile without appropriate mechanisms to enabling their effectiveness. The efforts at fighting corruption in Nigeria have been largely caricature without any tangible essence. In a country where the system is lenient to corruption at all levels of governance and leadership, and the penal codes gives no real punishment to corrupt practices offenders, there is bound to be the persistence of corruption. The inherent knowledge of the Low-risk High-benefit that public office holders have had for decades and which has been the practice is what has remained a major motivating factor for continuing corrupting practices in Nigeria (Ijewereme, 2015). Fighting corruption in Nigeria requires a good and a purposeful leadership that can champion the course. In addition, new legal frameworks at penalizing corrupt practices have to be designed and the current penal codes for corrupt public officials needs be reviewed and possibly replaced. A more stringent penal code is required to serving as deterrent to individuals with potential corrupt tendencies. The implementation of the cashless policy needs to be strengthened (Ayoola, 2013), and the use of Information Systems and Technologies at committing financial frauds and money laundering and other criminal offences needs to be curtailed and stopped. International and local collaborations with anti-corruption agencies and the use of forensic auditing systems to fighting corruption in Nigeria is also advocated (Aderonmu, 2011; Uthman, et al. 2015; Eiya & Otolor, 2013). Transparency in governance and accountability on the part of leaders will go a long way in helping to establishing trust between leaderships and their followers. Secrecy in governance and public management should be jettisoned for an opened and fluidic exchange of information between leaders and the citizens. Governments and public office holders should make concerted efforts at rebuilding the trust of citizens in the social contracts, and at assuring citizens about a new paradigm through exemplary leadership and sheer discipline. The Nigerian oil and gas sectors and the power sector should be duly reformed with the principle of prudent financial management and transparency. Public spending and accountability should be more transparent. The use of Information Technology (IT) to informing citizens on the true state of the nation should be encouraged to foster trust and connection between leadership and the citizens. Genuine efforts at encouraging participatory democracy should be fostered to prevent the imposition of corrupt politicians and rent-seekers on the citizens. Lastly, the tenets of the anti-corruption crusade and discipline should be introduced into the educational curriculum at all levels of education, and a comprehensive framework guiding the functions of the local

anti-corruption agencies should drafted and duly implemented.

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