

Corruption as a Social Problem and its Implication on Nigerian Society: A Review of Anticorrupt Policies

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Abstract

This paper examines corruption as one of the major social problems in Nigerian society. Though corruption in society is discussed generally, emphasis is placed on official corruption. The analysis was based on secondary data obtained from text, newspapers and archival materials. The scope of the paper covers; conceptual analysis, review of anti-corruption policies; a critique of corruption control efforts in Nigeria; prospect of eradicating corruption in Nigeria, recommendations and conclusion. This paper presents a critical analysis of government policies on corruption control, the effects of which are not felt by ordinary Nigerians, suffering from the consequences of corruption and the problems such policies faced. The paper provided possible recommendations for the elimination of corruption which include among others: professionalization of public service and the removal of bureaucratic conditions which promotes corruption.

Keywords: *Corruption, social problem, anti-corruption policies, bureaucratic organisation*

1. Introduction

Corruption is a common word in the vocabulary of every Nigerian citizen, corruption is popular in the home, street, associations, groups, public and private bureaucratic organizations, traditional institutions and even the Church. Almost all levels of Nigerian society is perverted by corruption. Ndubisi (1991:22) described corruption in Nigeria as endemic and Egonmwan (1992:181) considered corruption as a sub-culture in Nigeria. These scholars viewed the problems in Nigeria as a result of corruption occasioned by Nigerians and our leaders. From the collapsed of our traditional institutions, failure of public enterprises, decay and inefficiency of our public service, to the failure of private entrepreneurs to function in our society as agent of growth and development are all considered as consequences of corruption in our society and body polity.

The tragic story of Nigerian retrogression since its political independent from Britain in 1960 is a very sad one indeed. Well meaning Nigerians are much concerned that despite the bountiful endowment of good climate, national resources and the advantages of the Arab "oil politics" in the 1970's, Nigeria has made no substantial progress in economic development and modernization. Various reasons have been given by scholars to explain these problems of stagnation, underdevelopment, leadership and succession crises, among these reasons is corruption. Ndubisi (1991) expressed the view that corruption flourishes in Nigeria just as weeds flourishes in the bush. The effects of which, to

Ndubisi (1991:46) includes failure of government policies and programmes, which are constantly subverted by corrupt practices.

The main purpose of this paper is to explain the level of corruption in Nigeria, and to see if government policies towards the eradication of corruption or the reduction of the level of corruption achieved their set objectives. Investigation of findings of this paper was limited by the difficulties involved in obtaining information about the subject matter "Corruption". The investigator relied on Secondary data obtained from text, journals and archival materials. The paper was not limited in scope as it focused generally on the Nigerian society and analogies were drawn from various constituencies and groups, associations and particularly the state and its agencies.

Considering the level of corruption in Nigerian society and its effect on socio-economic development, successive government in Nigeria made different policies and established institutional framework with which to fight corruption and bring about probity and accountability in order to ensure good governance and efficient management of national resources for the good of all citizens and development. This paper presents an overview of corruption in Nigeria, a conceptual analysis of corruption, evaluation of anti-corruption policies in Nigeria, prospect of eliminating corruption in Nigeria as well as major recommendations for elimination of corruption.

2. Conceptual Analysis and Review

Section 98 of the criminal code refers to corruption as "the receiving or offering of some benefits, rewards or inducement to sway or deflect a person employed in the public service from the honest and impartial discharge of his duties." In common usage, corruption is used synonymously with bribery. But in real application corruption applies to the Bureaucracy whether public or private. In this sense, one can talk of Bureaucratic corruption, which Ndubisi (1991:49) defined as "any act by a public official which violates the accepted standards of behaviour in order to serve private or selfish ends." The end which this behaviour will serve may be social, economic or political. The standard so violated by the official maybe legal or conventional, the emphasis of the notion of corruption is on the violation of such legal or conventional norms for private gain.

2.1 Parties in corrupt Acts and Level of Corruption

In any corrupt act there are three classes of mediating actors in our public institutions, namely, the corrupt, the corruptor and the non-participating audience. The corruptor is the person who offers gratification in order to change the standard. The corrupt receives the gratification and perform the actual act of undermining the standard. The audience are those who observed the corrupt act and keep quiet. The audience do not participate in the act but they condoned the act. Bell (1953:103) maintained that all the actors are part of the act.

Corruption as it exists in governmental institutions is either voluntary or involuntary. In voluntary corruption, the person who receives a favour or expedites his things will volunteer to reward the officials to his right. In involuntary corruption, things will not be one, even the legitimate ones, unless the officer(s) are bribed, however, reluctant one may be. Ndubisi (1991:46) maintained that whether corruption is voluntary or involuntary the contact may be direct or indirect.

2.2 Classification of Corruption

Sabong (1993) identified two dimensions of corruption namely; petty corruption and big corruption. Petty corruption is the one that is visible, common among citizens and detectable by law. It is common among junior civil servants and users of public services. It is rampant among finance officers, customs officers, police, and other military and para-military officers. The finance officers are those who authorize expenditure and those that collect revenue. These finance officers engaged in such corrupt practices as collection of bribes before expenditure is approved or payment is made while the customs officers are the grave diggers of the import and export trade at airports, seaports and other entry and exit routes. The police and other para-military collect bribes from road users and other offenders to pervade justice. The big corruption are those that take place behind the scene as opposed to open corruption, and it has more serious consequences. It thrives in unsuspected, imperceptible circles. More educated people who conduct their affairs more discretely are involved. It is carried out by top bureaucrats in the public services. It includes such corrupt practices as the payment of certain percent of contract value before contract is signed, fictitious budgeting, inflation of payroll to increase personnel cost and subvention.

Ndubisi (1991:47) identified and explained three types of corruption prevalence in Nigeria to include endemic, planned and developmental corruption. Endemic corruption is the abuse of office which occurs in varying degrees. It

prevails in the administrative systems which control exclusively the distribution of scarce welfare services. In endemic corruption money is given to, or demanded by public officials so that they will ignore the rules of conduct set up by the government for public good. Planned corruption is an instrument of controlled by politicians to retain power at all cost, while developmental corruption are all activities by public officials which are at variance with standard rules and hinders the success of developmental programmes.

Yahaya (1993:70) discovered three categories of corruption in Nigeria, in which there various forms of corruption identified above can be classified. These categories are; political corruption, corruption in the routine course of government business and corruption in the exercise of substantive government business.

Political Corruption: This include election and electoral fraud, rigging of election result, awards of false contracts, wealth acquisition through financial impropriety by political officer holders, misuse and abuse of political or bureaucratic office, nepotism and tribalism.

Corruption in the routine course of Government Business: This includes bribes solicited for and paid to have compromising documents retrieve from files and for other favours, payment for letters of recommendation, kick-backs for hiring government equipment, all forms of bribes, false travel documents and other claims, ghost workers and salary frauds, neglect of public service for personnel business.

Corruption in the exercise of substantive government business: This includes false bills, court tampering, postal frauds, all form of tax frauds and auditing frauds. This list is not in any way exhaustive, but does help to expose the various corrupt practices which thrive in Nigerian governmental institutions.

2.3 Corruption as a Social Problem

A social problem, according to Ottong and Bassey (2011), is a problem whose causes and solutions lie outside the individual and the individual's immediate environment. Etuk (2002) defines social problem as a social condition that negatively affects the lives and proper social functioning of a significant number of people in the society. Lauer and Lauer (2007) maintains that:

"A social problem is a condition or pattern of behaviour that contradicts some other condition or patterns of behaviour and is defined as incompatible with the desired quality of life; is caused, facilitated, or prolonged by factors that operate at multiple levels of social life; involves intergroup conflicts; and requires social action to be resolved."

Corruption in all its ramifications is a social problem. The causes of corruption are well outside an individual. Corruption affects the entire society. The attempt by government to formulate and implement different policies to combat corruption reveals collective action in resolving it. Corruption in all its ramifications contradicts the accepted standard of behaviour and value in any society. It is in this regard that this paper looks at corruption as one of the pressing social problems in Nigerian society in contemporary time.

2.4 Theoretical Analysis of Corruption

Bell (1953) analyzed the functional effects of corruption maintained that corruption provides a process by which members of a society can manipulate a political system which is unable to cope with the demands made upon it. To Bell (1953) the system is essentially unworkable without the existence of corruption. Consequently, Bell (1953) suggested that criminal behaviour including corruption by public officials can be considered a substitute avenue of achieving positive response to demand emanating from environment to the Bureaucratic machinery. Bell's notion is doubtful because corruption is not only induce by the environment but can be initiated by the officials of the bureaucratic institutions as noted by Ndubusi (1981:47) analysis of endemic corruption which is the actual demand for bribe by bureaucrats to ignore the rules of conduct set up by the government for public good. Bell (1953) also provides the dysfunctional aspect of corruption.

Departing from Bell (1953) functional analysis of corruption, Leff (1964:8,14) presented corruption as a stabilizing force which by protecting special interests in a crucial stage in the countries development, helps to increase investment, economic stability and growth. Considering Nigeria and the outlawed parallel market for foreign exchange (black market), instead of stimulating inflow of capital, it encourages outflow. Secondly, corrupt wealth in Nigeria is spent on consumption rather than on investment. On these two grounds, there is total objection to Leff thesis that corruption induces development, thus, functional to the development of society in line with Merton (1968) social function as the observed consequences of action on the system. In view of this theoretical analysis, it is proper to review government efforts at eliminating or reducing corruption.

3. Anti-Corruption Policies in Nigeria

As noted earlier, the level of corruption in Nigeria is alarming and these conditions have been on for over three decades now, commencing immediately after the civil war in the early 1970's. One of the major reasons for the overthrow of Gowon's administration in 1976 was widespread corruption by public officials. This condition also led to the overthrow of Shagari government in 1983. The massive corruption of the late 1980's to 1998 by Babangida and Abacha government plunged Nigeria into the unbridled debt position, inflation, economic regression, social unrest and a near state of anarchy experience even till date.

Successive governments in Nigeria are aware of the problems associated with massive and alarming rate of corruption. All Nigerians are part of the corruption subculture, as they participate either voluntarily or involuntarily. Corruption is today in the words of Okigbo (1993:103) systemic. Hence, anybody who is a part of the Nigerian system is compelled to participate in all systemic activities, which corruption is one of.

In order for our society to move forward and Nigeria project to move ahead towards improvement, successive governments have put certain policies and institutions in place in order to reduce the level of corruption in Nigeria. These policies include: anticorruption campaign, the Ombudsman system; system of inventory of property and assets; illegal wealth investigation system; internationalisation of corruption control; anti-corruption law; and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission.

3.1 Anti-corruption campaign

This consists of appealing to the people, workers, judges and law enforcement agencies to fight corruption in the civil services and public life. This presupposes a merciless and decisive struggle devoid of any extenuating circumstances. In Nigeria, this was possible with the activities of War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAI-C), Agency for Mass Mobilization Social and Economic Recovery (MANSER), National Orientation Agency (N.O.A). These bodies performed anti-corruption functions by promoting functional high ethical and moral value. The problem with this process is that successive government changes such bodies to suit them.

3.2 The Ombudsman System

This consists in entrusting to a person within an institution invested with considerable powers under the common law, the protection of individuals or users of public freedom and property from which they may suffer on the part of civil servants. In Nigeria Public Complaints Commission was established in 1975 to perform this function. The major problem is that the Commission lacks the power to enforce its recommendations (Oluwu 1993:96).

3.3 System of Inventory of Property and Assets

This system involves making civil and public servants from certain level to declare their property and assets on taking and leaving office. Section 158 of the 1979 constitution spelt out code of conduct, for public officers (now section 172 of 1999 constitution). It was designed to remove the incidence of corrupt practices and ill-gotten wealth by public officers from entire public service. Two institutions so created were Code of Conduct Bureau and Code of Conduct Tribunal. The Bureau is to receive the declaration of assets made by public officers, while the tribunal is to enforce the penalties spelt out in the code. Their setback is the power of superior court of record to set aside its decisions

3.4. Illegal Wealth Investigation System

It is a "Posteriori" control method which presumes that the constitutive facts of illegal wealth have already been accomplished. In Nigeria, this principle has just been recently introduced through the Money Laundering and Related Offences Act. The power is vested in the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) to investigate all wealth suspected to be acquired through corrupt means. Consequently, all Bank transaction above N5,000,000.00 for corporate organisations and N1,000,000.00 for individuals must be reported to National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (Buhari, 1994).

3.5 Internationalization of Anti-corruption

Today, countries go into bi-lateral and multi-lateral agreements to fight corruption. International conventions impose

economic sanctions against countries with corrupt leaders. Leaders who stole money to foreign accounts are compelled to return such moneys. This is the case of Sani Abacha loots return to Nigerian government by foreign Banks and Government. The case of the Governor of Bayelsa State arrested with foreign currency in Britain, and the imprisonment of the Delta State governor and his wife in Britain, is also worthy of note.

3.6. *Anti Corruption Law of 2000*

This is a law to prohibit and prescribe punishment for corrupt practices and other related offences passed by the National Assembly and signed into law by the President of Federal Republic of Nigeria at Abuja, on Tuesday, 13th June 2000.

Major Provision

- A. The act established "The Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission.
- B. Duty of the Commission:
 - (1) Implementation of the Anti-corruption Act.
 - (2) Instruct, advise government on ways corruption and fraud may be eliminated, minimized or reduced.
 - (3) To educate the public on and against bribery, corruption and related offences.
 - (4) To enlist and foster public support in combating corruption.
 - (5) To examine practices and procedures, and if it aids corruption, to direct and supervise a review.
- C. The act highlights offences and penalties.
- D. Power to investigate, seize, search and arrest.

It is worthy to note that the commission is subject to the power of the Attorney General of the Federation as the Act stipulates that the Commission should not do anything without the consent of the Attorney General. The High Court has jurisdiction over all cases related to the act.

3.7. *Economic and Financial Crime Commission*

This is another institution established by Act of National Assembly to examine corrupt wealth. It focuses on economic crime, bank fraud etc. The Commission is established by money laundry and related offences Act Decree 419, now Economic and Related Offences Act.

4. A critique of Corruption Control Effort in Nigeria

Government effort at reducing the level of corruption in Nigeria has been on for a long time, considering the various strategies listed and explained above. Despite the government attempt to combat corruption, proper management of public property by our public administration today is disastrous due to corruption. Corruption is the root cause of economic crisis, as well as the social and political problems besetting Nigeria. As it is now, it is either the Nigerian state kills corruption or corruption kills her. Corruption is an evil that spread terror among citizens who are the victims and comforts those who use it as a means to acquire wealth. It is a sickness difficult to cure once infected of. The anti-corruption policy currently in force in Nigeria to fight corruption is on the whole ineffective. The underlisted facts explained why the anti-corruption policies cannot help reduce the level of corruption or eliminate it: Lack of continuity and change in Policy framework; Inappropriate organizational structure in implementation of policies; Politicization of policy and political opposition during policy implementation; Lack of political will; Low level of public enlightenment; Socio-cultural constraints.

4.1 *Lack of continuity and change in policy framework*

In Nigeria, successive government always enact laws on every major issue of our social life, which corruption is one. The numerous anti-corruption strategies are what government put in place from time to time. The frequency at which these policies are changed does not give each policy adequate time for implementation, and as such the goals or objectives can not be achieved when the policies are changed. Egonmwan (1987:245) maintained that rapid regimes changes causes alteration in policy priorities and make policy implementation more difficult because new regime always come with entirely different priorities and objective resulting in policy switch over.

4.2 Inappropriate organizational structure in implementation

The choice of appropriate organizational structure in the implementation of policy is problematic. Today we have in Nigeria various organizations combating corruption, to what extent are these anti-corruption organizations able to penetrate all states and local governments, or all ministries, agencies and parastatals in Nigeria? Inadequate personnel, communication gadgets, infrastructures affect such organization like National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission to function effectively in State and Local Government Areas. The level of centralization without decentralization for holistic coverage also influence the efficiency of these anti-corruption organizations.

4.3 Politicization of policy and political opposition to policy implementation

Anti-corruption institutions and policies are often politicized. For instance, during Buhari-Idiagbon Administration War Against Indiscipline and Corruption was used for clamping down political opponents, while Obasanjo's administration used Economic and Financial Crime Commission to clamp down opposition. Soyinka (2006) analysis of anti-corruption effort in Nigeria noted that the arrest of General Marwa by EFCC is politically motivated. This politicization prompted the opposition to cry out that the anti-corruption law is nothing more than instrument of suppression against political opponent.

4.4 Lack of political will

Government at times made very good policies, but the implementation of such policy is another problem. For instance, the Economic and Financial Crime Commission received report on the Minister of Water Resources. EFCC refused to investigate and prosecute as appropriate because the government was scared that anything done to him may affect the political support for Federal Government from North Eastern Region. (Guardian 4th Feb., 2006).

4.5 Inadequate public enlightenment

There may be an issue of public concern like corruption, and policies to eliminate such problems. But it is another if member of the society are sufficiently aware of such problem and the policy remedies for such problem. Many Nigerians are not aware of the rate of corruption and the negative consequences of corruption, neither are they aware of the various policy options aim at eliminating corruption. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) which replaces Agency for Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) failed to penetrate the grassroots and the rural population. Neither of these two agencies maintained officers or other networking structures in the rural areas to sensitize rural populace about corruption.

4.6 Cultural constraints

Based on cultural background of some communities, certain policies are opposed to by the Community. For instance, the northern religious view does not see smuggling as a crime but government officials, private individual uses government apparatus to promote smuggling in the North.

This countered government anti-corruption drives. The socio-economic condition of people also promote corruption, some communities in Nigeria encourages gratification and this affects members of such communities in discharging their function in bureaucratic organizations. In this regard, is the high level of poverty, where everybody considers corrupt practices as the only way of generating additional income for poverty alleviation. All these acted against government effort using policies formulation and implementation for the eradication of corruption in Nigeria.

5. Prospect for Eradicating Corruption in Nigeria

The future of our great country is bleak without eradication of corruption. We must put every thing in place to eliminate corruption from our society. Any country with high level of corruption cannot achieve economic advancement and social development. The fight against corruption is the responsibility of every citizen.

The first approach to reduce and eradicate corruption in future is to carry out extensive anti-corruption campaign in order to ensure social re-orientation. Enlightenment programmes, and campaign for social re-orientation will automatically build up anti-corruption national consciousness in the mind of all Nigerians (Bassey, 1997:46).

Another way of eradicating corruption from our social conduct is by ensuring the "Rule of Law." Rule of law according to Tyagi (1981) is concerned with independence of the Judiciary, the equality of citizens before the law, the supremacy of judicial pronouncement and subjection of both bureaucratic and general social norms to judicial interpretation. If these are achieved, the level of corruption by public official will be greatly reduced. When there is reduction in the level of corruption in public life, other segments of the society will automatically re-examine itself. These facts give us hope. There are many other things to be considered in view of recommendation to create a corruption free future for Nigeria.

6. Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Recommendation

Having thus established the persistence of corruption and its crippling effects on performance of social institutions in our society, the following recommendations have been made towards curbing corruption in Nigeria. The issue of democratization must be pursued vigorously by the government in order to ensure legislative control of all anti-corruption policies to promote accountability and reduce corruption. The only way to reduce the effect of traditional values which promotes corruption is by ensuring national integration through equitable distribution of national wealth.

Focus should be directed towards eliminating institutional weakness that promotes corruption in the Public Service. Adebayo (1985) also suggested professionalism, as it is only professional associations that can effectively discipline their member by withdrawing practicing license. The fear of withdrawal of license will not allowed professionals employed by organizations to engage in corrupt practices. In this regard, all chartered professional institutes should join in the fight against corruption, public and private organizations must be professionalized for corruption to be a thing of the past. Other ways of controlling corruption are outlined by Anandu (1990) which include: public declaration of asset, retirement and termination of appointment of all officials who engage in corruption, investigation of all suspected illegal wealth.

6.2 Conclusion

The consequences of corruption are enormous, for instance, corruption causes capacity underutilization, personnel inefficiency and ineffectiveness, capital wastage, policy distortion, as well as organizational and system decay. In view of the negative consequences of corruption on our social institutions and society as a whole, this paper provides both theoretical background to the understanding of corruption and the various ways corruption manifest itself in our society. The high rate of corruption makes the future and destiny of our great nation bleak. Recommendations are made on how to combat corruption and move our great country Nigeria forward. But the greatest recommendation is for the government to avoid changing the grand norm of our Nation (the constitution) to help selfish leaders achieve their goal of perpetuating themselves in office as it is an act of corruption.

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