Combating Corruption in Nigeria

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Abstract

Corruption is a bane to good governance and obstacle to development of any nation. Nigeria in the last fifty years has been thriving and flourishing in corruption with little or no serious effort at combating it. Corruption has become a popular language in virtually every household in Nigeria. Consequent upon this, an average Nigerian is generally believed to be corrupt in one way or the other, thereby making Nigeria to be rated high at all times in corruption. This paper examines types, causes and effects of corruption in Nigeria. The paper relied on secondary data as its sources of information. It concludes that corruption must be vehemently deterred and genuinely fought so as to ensure good governance and sustainable development.

Keywords: Corruption, Nigeria, Federal government, Embezzlement and Development

Introduction

Nigeria is blessed with human and material resources. Consequent upon this, it is expected that a larger population of the country lives in affluence, ironically preponderance of Nigerian population live in abject poverty. Poverty has pervaded the entire segment of the country. Surprisingly, democratic system of government has not suppressed the virulent growth of poverty in Nigeria. There are more questions than answers. For instance, it is aptly correct to ask: why poverty amidst plenty in Nigeria? Corruption has become a popular phenomenon in the nation’s political system. It has indeed become a society-induced activity in the sense that, it now enjoys popular support from the people, invariably, corruption has been democratized. This happens as a result of the inability to capture and understand the generic meaning of corruption, which has further given it a toga of social recognition and acceptance in all the societies within the country. Although, corruption is a global phenomenon, it occurs in monarchy, democracies and military dictatorships; at all levels of development and in all types of economic systems from open capitalist economies to centrally planned economies. The fact remains that corruption differs widely in its forms, pervasiveness and consequences, in developed countries the effect may be less severe, while in developing countries particularly African continent where the effect may be too severe for citizens to bear, as demonstrated. In Nigeria, corruption affects every facet of human development. Little wonder, the Transparency International (TI), an NGO of international repute continue to rate and score Nigeria high
among the corrupt countries in the world. The futile attempt by the government to fight the cankerworm stems from the fact that government itself is greatly infected with the virus and an average Nigeria is seen as corrupt in most parts of the world. It is against this background that this chapter examines the causes, types and effects of corruption. And the various ways of achieving corruption free society through the recommendations capable of reducing the practice corruption.

Corruption: A Conceptualization and Review of the Problematic

Corruption as a concept seems difficult to define. Its high degree of relativity has attracted the use of methodological pluralism by scholars to scientifically explain the concept. There have been various definitions and explanations attached to it. For the purpose of this study, we are going to bring up some of the definitions of corruption for better understanding of this work.

Webster’s Dictionary of the English Language International Edition, submits that, “corruption in modern usage connotes debase, decay, rottenness, dishonest and immoral behavior”.

Corruption is a behavioral attitude contrary to or at the variance with the set rules and agreed norms (Onyeziri, 2004).

Pervasive corruption has remained a serious obstacle to economic development in Nigeria. Corruption inhibits human and social development. Public institutions are only public in name, because they are run, in fact, for the purpose of private accumulation (Usman, 1980:63).

Corruption is the biggest problem Nigeria has, a bane to good governance, which has invariably translated into corrosive and perpetual poverty among the citizenry. This is as a result of the fact that the money that is supposed to be expended on social needs and infrastructures to engender development circulates among and within the few privileged and thereafter, taken abroad for investment.

According to Gyekye (1997), “Post Colonial Africa is among the worst victims of political corruption. It probably constitutes the most serious source of the financial haemorrhage suffered by developing nations in Africa, also the most common cause of the military overthrow of civilian governments in Africa with the consequent disruption of the democratic political process”. Thus, corruption is the greatest and most serious disease of governments in Africa; hence, it is the greatest obstacle on path to development.

Kolawole, in his paper titled “Military in Politics”, sees corruption as a crucial factor that breeds military intervention. In his analysis, he believes corruption can be monetary or otherwise. It may be in form of using money to pollute the political landscape and suppressing independent thoughts and behavior. It may also be in form of the suppression physically of all forms of opposition and thereby creating a state of political disorder (Kolawole, 1997).
In the same vein, Mimiko (1998) traces the institutionalization of corruption to Babangida regime when he opines that;

Under the eight-year rule of Ibrahim Babangida, corruption virtually became the rule. Official corruption was more or less legalized as government itself took the lead in what became known as the “settlement syndrome”

Odey (2002) in his analytical discourse opines that “When the world says Nigeria is the most corrupt country in the world, it thinks about the many contract awarded by the President and his men; how many times the contracts were reviewed; the meager amount of the said sums that goes into the contract proper and the mind-boggling percentage of it that goes into private accounts; the world thinks of the many occasions where non-existence works are said to have been awarded in millions of naira completed and commissioned by people who put the money in their private accounts and go free with it.

Corruption is perceived as a cetaceous malaise in all sectors of Nigerian society. It is more noticeable in the public service sector including the Local Government service (Ajayi, 2000). He further observed that, corruption by political and civil official’s manifests in various dimensions such as embezzlement of public funds, misappropriation, inflation and indiscriminate re-evaluation of contracts and collaboration with contractors who may later pay kickbacks and percentage commissions to relevant officials and invariably leading to failed contracts and abandoned projects.

The Political Bureau described corruption as a house hold word in the Nigerian society from the highest levels of political and business elites to the ordinary person in the village.

Types Of Corruption

1. Moral Corruption: This is exhibited in sexual pervasiveness, greed especially in interpersonal relationships, loose tongue i.e. uncontrollable tongue such that leaks secrets or slanders or busy-body, indecent dressing or appearance etc.

2. Economic Corruption e.g. Manufacturing fake drugs, adulteration of drinks, piracy i.e. copying another person’s intellectual work to illegally enrich oneself (Plagiarism), fraud at all levels etc.

3. Political and Bureaucratic corruption: It is illegal, unethical and unauthorized exploitation of one’s political or official position for personal gain. It has to do with public affairs – goods, fortunes, agencies and resources. It is therefore corruption against the state or its agencies by a person holding an official position in pursuit of private or personal profit. In practical terms, political and bureaucratic corruption is usually associated with acceptance of bribe, but it is more than that, it involves fraud, nepotism, kickbacks, favoritism and misappropriation by public officials using their official positions for their own advantage (Ogbonnia, 2000).
4. **Electoral Corruption**: This has to do with electoral frauds such as election rigging, manipulations, ballot stuffing, registration of under age, and many others.

**Causes of Corruption**

1. The false perception of government as “they” as opposed to “us” thereby making the people detached from the government. And so, their business is to get as much as from the government as they can without getting into trouble (Ogbonnia, 2000).

2. **Lust for power**: The struggle by individuals and groups to get position of authority at all cost induces corruption. This usually manifest in bribes, electoral malfeasance.

3. **Lust for money**: Some individuals have natural greed for money, and so, any position they find themselves is seen as opportunity for them to loot and acquire wealth.

4. **Legitimacy Crisis**: In Nigeria today, most of the political office-holders assumed power through fraudulent means, which is undemocratic and illegitimate in a democracy. Such leaders tend to suffer identity and legitimacy crisis. And one of their strategies to garner popular support is the free distribution of public funds to influential people who could help them achieve peoples’ support.

5. **Paying to get a government benefit**: The government buys and sells goods and services, distribute subsidies, organizes privatization of state firms, and provides concessions. Officials frequently have a monopoly of valuable information. These activities create incentives and urge for corruption. When the government is a buyer or a contractor, there are several reasons to pay off officials. First, a firm may pay to be included in the list of qualified bidders. Second, it may pay to have officials’ structure bidding specifications so that the corrupt firm is the only qualified supplier. Third, a firm may pay to be selected as the winning contractor. Finally, once a firm has been selected, it may pay to get inflated prices or to skimp on quality (Susan, 1997).

6. **Paying for official positions**: When corruption is pervasive, positions in the state bureaucracy become valuable assets, and there will be derived demand for jobs in the state sector. In developing countries there is a lively market for positions in the bureaucracy that generate large bribes (Susan, 1997).

7. **Delay and Red Tapism**: Some officials delay unnecessarily so as to induce payoffs. This can happen either in contracting and auctioning or in administering regulatory and tax laws.

Oppression of the civil society from the government officials is another factor that induces corruption. There are many other factors emanating from social, economic and traditional settings.

**Effects of Corruption**

Corruption damages political legitimacy: Systemic corruption undermines the legitimacy of government especially democracies. Citizens may come to believe that the government is simply for sale to the highest bidder. Corruption undermines claims that government is substituting democratic values for decisions based on ability to pay. It can lead to coups by undemocratic leaders. Military take-over is frequently justified as a response to the corruption
of democratic rulers (Kolawole, 1997; Susan 1997, Diamond, 1993). The inference from this analysis is that corruption breeds political instability.

Corruption harms society by damaging economic development and reforms and hinders the growth of democratic institutions. It impedes the ability of developing countries to attract foreign investors and distorts capital allocation as well as impedes international trade.

Corruption also causes financial haemorrhage. It can lead to unhealthy power struggle, loss of social and moral values and unequal distribution of wealth.

Ways Of Combating Corruption

Because of its destructive propensity, corruption must be deterred in our society. Although, it is difficult but can still be fought to an insignificant level of existence. Successive governments have initiated various strategies aimed at fighting corruption such as War Against Indiscipline (WAI), Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) among others, yet, corruption continues unabated. It thrives because most of the institutions established to combat corruption are not either constitutionally, legally, organizationally nor financially empower to be independent in a way to act without external influence in discharging their duties. To genuinely war against corruption, the necessary institutions should be made effective and independent.

Importantly, there must be political commitment, will and capacity on the part of the leaders. Legal and institutional frameworks are not enough but appropriate laws are to be enacted to empower them to prosecute law breakers. Corruption cannot be fought by those leaders who ascended their position through corrupt practices and still thrive in corruption while in office.

Also, corrupt practice must be punished at all levels. Corruption can only be fought effectively when no one is spared. Anybody caught in the act must face the wrought of law, irrespective of his position in the government or status in the society. A “socio-psycho” mechanism for combating corruption should be developed by the civil society. Socio-psycho mechanism is the system of rejecting corrupt people and their assistance in the society. It is high time we stopped respecting their wealth and personality, every donation and form of assistance from them should be rejected. Nobody should be ready to be identified with them so that they can suffer identity crisis even within their primordial constituency. It is also reasonable that government should genuinely alleviate poverty to make this mechanism work.

Another important factor that should be considered in the fight against corruption is the immunity clause. The immunity clause ample judiciary and other anti graft agencies to work effectively. Because they do not have power to probe, question or sanction some of the political office holders. The clause itself is an attractive object of corruption or to corrupt practices by those that are concerned. Once they know they have become untouchable, then,
the tendency to act corruptly while in office becomes so high. Hence, the immunity clause must be expunged from the constitution as a matter of emphasis and urgency.

Unfortunately, the institutions set up by the Federal Government to fight corruption cannot be truly independent e.g. ICPC, EFCC and others. This is because they are agents of federal government. Therefore, they become tools in the hands of such level of government either to witch-hunt opponents or silent critics and mostly the innocent civil servants, who are earnestly waiting to get their entitlement.

Also, the legislature needs to be alive to their oversight functions especially at state level. They should not create unnecessary rapport of conspiracy that will further amputate them from checking the excesses of the executive. Although, a good relationship between the two is important to facilitate effective performance, but a relationship that consolidate democracy and not the one that strengthens patronage.

There must be strict observance of separation of power by the three arms of government. The necessary institutions created for anti-corruption must be adequately funded, independent and their capacity fully enhanced.

Religious, educational and marriage institutions are also to be strengthened for role performance. This is because fundamentally corruption is in the heart and so requires moral approach to deal with it; this moral approach involves education, enlightenment and orientation geared towards attitudinal change of the people, which can be effectively carried out by these institutions.

There should be anti-corruption unit that will be independent in all departments of government ministries, agencies and parastatals. And the anti-corruption should not only focus on fiscal accountability, it should also deal with managerial accountability to ensure that managers utilize public resources and eliminate wastage.

Lastly, electoral corruption is the worst of them all because it gives way to other corrupt practices. There should be strict penalty, if it is possible life imprisonment, for whoever is caught in electoral corruption.

References


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