

Corruption, the Albatross against Good Governance in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Corruption is the most virulent affliction bedeviling Nigeria today. Discussants and argumentators at local and international form are concentric that more than any other consideration, corruption grinds the wheel of good governance to a halt. This paper examines what corruption connotes, embodies and exemplifies. It looks at various manifestations of corruption and recommends ways in which a grim fight against it will engender good governance to the relief and happiness of the people of Nigeria.

KEYWORDS: *Corruption, Good Governance, Development*

Introduction:

Today's Nigeria is bedevilled by many ills but the most virulent and seemingly intractable of the lot is corruption. As a polity the people and government of Nigeria have unwittingly allowed this malaise to smear our reputation locally and internationally. Unfortunately it appears that there is nothing anybody anywhere can do about it. By a stroke of luck and determination to effect a positive, heart-warming change in its entire structure, Nigeria overwhelmingly voted a government that appears, from all indications, to be fully prepared and determined to give corruption a good fight. The obvious willingness of the masses of the people of Nigeria to give full, unswerving support to government at all levels will make the defeat of corruption and the total evaporation of its attendant vicious consequences an imminent accomplishment.

There is a consensus among Nigerians that corruption is endemic in the country. It has, over decades, enriched the political elite and endangered developmental process. There exists abundant literature on the causes and possible solutions to this social phenomenon but not much has been done by successive governments to halt the menace (Omilusi, 2015:42). As noted by Alemika (2010:3) corruption is widespread and is increasingly being tolerated by the public. Corruption in the country seems to have acquired immunity against various political and legal measures aimed at its control. The problem is stifling economic development, eroding public bureaucratic efficacy, widening inequality, and undermining the creation of opportunities and delivery of social services for the citizens, especially those who are socially, economically and politically disadvantaged.

Corruption is so pervasive in Nigeria that it has turned public service for many into a kind of criminal enterprise. Graft has fueled political violence, denied millions of Nigerians access to even the most basic health and education services, and reinforced police abuses and other widespread patterns of human rights violations (HRW, 2011:1). That almost all the sectors of the country are blighted by corruption is a sickening fact that Nigerians do not attempt to dispute. From the political class to public and private businesses, there are noticeable ravages of corruption. Corruption has taken a full endemic growth in Nigeria as a

country. It gets more and more ingrained, especially as the economy deteriorates and the rate of crime increases.

Corruption, a Conceptual Framework

As it is invariably the case when an array of competent and informed people is involved in discussing any issue, there will be a flood gate of views, opinions and positions. Very many scholars and critics have given what they consider acceptable and enveloping definitions of the concept called corruption. Some of these will be seen presently.

Corruption is seen by Aluko (1977) as the perversion or destruction of integrity in the discharge of public duties by bribery and favour. Putting the issue more poignantly, Ogundiya (2012) contends that corruption is the diversion of material wealth, intended for the effective achievement of socially desirable ends into the pockets of individuals.

Sofola (1994) sounds poetic and musical when he said corruption is a process of trade in societal rewards, a process whereby power is traded for wealth, wealth is traded for prestige, prestige for wealth and wealth for prestige.

It is relevant to state that apart from scholars whose views about corruption are examined here, institutions are also not left out in the arduous task of identifying corruption and tackling it frontally. Transparency International, TI (2003) defines corruption as “the misuse of entrusted power for private benefit”. This position by TI, succinct as it is, is sufficiently illuminating and insightful into the nature and scope of corruption. It suggests that anybody who finds himself in position of power simply appropriates the power and uses it for the benefits of himself exclusively and sometimes, of his immediate family and other cronies and lackeys surrounding him.

Dey (1989) notes that corruption is any act that is undertaken with the deliberate intent of deriving or extracting monetary or other benefits by encouraging or conniving at illegal activities.

In the light of the foregoing it is deductive that all the definitions examined here center on one thing, the unfair advantage that power confers on unscrupulous individuals who hold power in trust for the rest of us.

Corruption is a word with so many facets and ramifications that it cannot be easily defined. The World Bank has defined corruption as “the abuse of public office for private gain. The word corruption is originally from the Latin verb ‘rumpere’ which means to break. Following from the above, corruption means the breaking of certain code of conduct for the personal benefit of the perpetrator. For example, Sen (cited in Aluko 2009:2), defines it as “the violation of established rules for personal gain and profit”. Macrae (1982: 670) defined corruption as “an arrangement that involves an exchange between two parties (the demander and the supplier) which (i) has an influence on the allocation of resources either immediately or in the future; and (ii) involves the use or abuse of public or collective responsibility for private ends.” In his analysis, Alex Gboyega (1996:312) conceives of corruption as any decision, act or conduct that was perverse to democratic norms and values. It also covers any decision, act or conduct that subverts the integrity of people in authority or institutions charged with promoting, defending or sustaining the democratization process, thereby undermining its effectiveness in performing its assigned roles.

Svensson (2005), Tanzi (1998) and Transparency International (Ti 2003 and 2009) define corruption as the abuse or misuse of public office or power for private gain or benefit. Ocheje (2001) from a legal perspective observes that official corruption refers to deviation from the duties or rules of public service. He adds that is easier to identify what corruption is not, as opposed to what corruption is because of the forms in which corruption manifests itself ‘The definitions advanced by Svensson (2005), Tanzi (1998, 564) and TI, define corruption as it relates to the public sector alone as if it does not occur in the private sector.

This however, fits our study. But, it is worthy to note that corruption is not only undertaken for personal or self-gain, as it can also be undertaken for the benefit of a third party or both.

Good Governance, What is Connotes

To the ordinary man, good governance connotes the ability of elected representatives in all tiers of government to do that which is right in all places and at all times to benefit the greatest number of the people. The common man sees bad governance on the other hand as the failure of elected representatives in government to provide good network of roads, potable water supply, stable supply of electricity, security of lives and property and amenities and infrastructure that will make life more abundant for the governed.

Like corruption, the concept of governance is seen by many from different perspectives. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund, IMF (2006) define governance as the manner in which public officials and institutions acquire and exercise authority to shape public policy and provide public goods and services. In an independent submission, the World Bank (1992) says that governance includes the form or nature of the political regime; the processes by which authority is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources; and the capacity of governments to design, formulate and implement policy and deliver goods and services. In discussing governance it becomes almost impossible to sideline the term democracy. Today no discussion about the political, social and economic development of any nation is complete without alluding copiously to democracy and its beneficial impacts on society.

Good governance entails the establishment of a representative and accountable form of government; good governance requires a strong and pluralistic civil society, where there is freedom of expression and association; good governance requires good institutions - sets of rules governing the actions of individuals and organizations and the negotiation of differences between them.; good governance requires the primacy of the rule of law, maintained through an impartial and effective legal system; and good governance requires a high degree of transparency and accountability in public and corporate processes.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP: 1997:1) has identified nine characteristics or principles of good governance which represent the ideal- Participation, Rule of Law, Consensus Orientation, Transparency, Responsiveness, Equity, Effectiveness and Efficiency, Accountability and Strategic Vision. There is some overlap between these and the eight governance aspects included in the good governance principle in the Local Government Declaration to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. These are; effective leadership, transparency, accountability, probity, proper management and effective services, equitable access to services, a commitment to partnership working, and institutional capacity building (WACLAC, 2002 cited in Omilusi, 2013).

The Nexus between Corruption and Good Governance

Corruption, as we have seen from this exposition is a terrible monster which is holding Nigeria by its jugular threatening to asphyxiate it and snuff life out of it permanently. Until recently, Nigeria lay helpless, prostrate on the bare ground in the vicious grip of corruption, It prevents leaders from discharging their duties efficiently to the admiration of their followers. It prevents the delivery of good and services to the civil populace. It erodes the integrity of the people in government and pauperizes the citizenry.

Ake (1996) notes that politics under-develops Nigeria because corruption has crept into the political life of the nation. He adds that political power is used for the accumulation of wealth. Hear him:

The wealthiest people in Nigeria are generally people who have acquired wealth through state power; by political corruption; by access to state contracts, agency rates or concessions such as import licenses which does not usually involve

them in direct productive activity. So, in Nigeria, wealth is tangentially dissociated from effort, from productive capitalist enterprises. Pp 29.

What further argument do we need to accentuate the destructive influence of corruption on good governance in Nigeria. Government looks the other way and a few people, using the instrumentality of state power, corner the wealth of the nation and appropriate our common patrimony for private, iniquitous benefits.

One can go on and on. The uncanny rapport between corruption and political power which has robbed Nigeria by credible tangible growth is beyond description.

There are three fundamental threats to the construction of good governance and the rule of law in the developing world, namely corruption, clientelism, and capture. All three of these phenomena refer to the use of public office for private gain and their impact goes far beyond the simple diversion of funds. Corruption, in addition to directly enriching individual bureaucrats, distorts markets and hampers service delivery (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). Corruption is also defined as the abuse of entrusted public power for private benefit, While good governance refers to the exercise of authority through political and institutional processes that are transparent and accountable and encourage public participation, corrupt governance fails to offer citizens adequate and accurate information about government and policies, curtails the public's opportunities for participation, violates the public's right to be informed about government activities and procedures, and compromises the right to political participation. Thus, corruption weakens the accountability of State officials, reduces transparency in the work of State institutions and allows human rights violations to go unpunished (UN, 2007:59).

The theory of cephalo-caudal putrefaction

The operative words here, 'cephalo' and "caudal" have etymological origin in latin, meaning 'head' and 'tail' respectively. It is widely applied in Developmental Psychology to describe the growth of a neonate which is believed to start from head to toe. Other scholars of Developmental Psychology argue that a child's pattern of growth may also be "proximo-distal" i.e growth which starts from the middle and spreads to the peripheral parts of the body.

My submission and proposition in this paper is that corruption, inefficiency, unacceptable behavior, illegal acts all start from the top and percolate the system downwards. Like fish, putrefaction begins from head and spreads round its body.

Causes of corruption and its adverse effects on good governance

Konie (2003) identifies two basic forms of corruption which he named vertical corruption and horizontal. To him, vertical corruption takes place among the Managers and decision makers. Horizontal corruption, on the other hand involves everybody from top officials in government to the elite, the informed and the layman. Corruption is caused by a plethora of reasons which are briefly mentioned here.

Perhaps the greatest impetus to corruption is greed. Most people are never content with what they have acquired from their earnings from legitimate labour and toil. Others, in spite of what they have accumulated through graft and other unorthodox means, are never satisfied with their lot and their positions in life. They want to add more and more without actually pausing for a moment to determine precisely what they want and for what purpose.

Again, the law in Nigeria is a respecter of influential persons. It has been seen repeatedly that inconsequential people are punished heavily and disproportionately to insignificant infractions whereas highly placed Nigerians get away with heinous crimes with only a slap on the wrist. Aribisala (2014) narrates how an Osogbo Magistrate Court sentenced one Samson Atayero to a term of five years imprisonment for stealing some clothes and pair of sandals estimated at five thousand naira only.

In the same polity, a former Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balogun, who was accused by anti-graft agencies of stealing N17bn was sentenced to only a term of six months imprisonment. It is deductive from this that officials who are in positions to amass wealth will most willingly do so because they are fully aware that the benefits of corruption will outweigh whatever punishment is consequential to it.

Another reason Nigerians are engaged in corrupt practices is poor remuneration of public officials. The United Nations (UNGPAC 2012) submits that the salary structure in Nigeria is unacceptably low and incapable of supporting workers. The priority of the Nigerian government is to focus undeserved attention on the unproductive sectors like the National Assembly on whom a large chunk of the nation's resources is expended without commensurate value. Government officials are forced to steal and embrace corrupt practices to meet their needs of shelter, feeding, clothing and transportation. This is particularly true of the Federal Capital Tertiary, FCT, Abuja where a single room that is located in a high-brow residential area could cost between N250,000 and N400,00. How will a fresh graduate in a Federal Ministry come by this sum which he has to pay upfront.

Other reasons for finding corruption attractive are obsession with material things in contrast to spiritual things which edify us, the goddification of money, absence of ethical standards that govern and regulate our lives publicly and privately and the unfortunate recognition that is given to persons who have made it big without finding out how they came about their fabulous wealth.

The fallout from causes of corruption as seen here is that it affects national growth adversely and hinders good governance. The major effect of corruption is that it impairs the economic growth and wellbeing of poor people and inflicts pains on them. What is meant to aid their comfort has been cornered by mindless leaders and public officials who maintain callous indifference and uncanny insularity to their grief. Ademola (2011) maintains that corruption hurts the poor disproportionately by diverting funds intended for development, undermining the ability of government to provide basic services, fueling inequality and injustice, and discouraging foreign investments.

The level of societal stench and degeneracy in Nigeria today is a function of corruption. When money which should have been channelled into the provision of employment for youths is pocketed by a few political heavy weights, the immediate consequence is that unemployed youths out-do themselves in the struggle to offer themselves as body guards, and errand boys for the most pedestrian of errands, praise-singers, cheer-leaders and hirelings and willing tools for the most objectionable of assignments. The immediate past Governor of Akwa Ibom State. Godswill Akpabio, now a Senator, is being investigated by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, for allegedly defrauding his state of N108.1bn. Going by the mood of Nigeria today the ex-Governor may be forced to refund a large chunk of the loot. In the not too distant past, he would have gone away with the heist without anyone raising as much as a whimper of protest.

It is unfortunate that corruption has doomed the future of the youths of Nigeria who erroneously imbibe the destructive orientation that hardwork, honesty and integrity no longer pay. Youths who have acquired skills in the course of previous training are not ready to engage themselves productively because they are perennially optimistic that crumbs must fall from the tables of their corrupt benefactors. Need we say anything about missing files in the cabinets of Ministries because the owners of such files have not greased the palms of officials who should work on them. What about traffic wardens who create needless vehicular gridlocks to extort money from drivers, especially, of commercial vehicles. This is done with appalling impurity because their superior officers will receive their own regular, normal returns.

Recommendations Oil how the absence of corruption can engender good governance in Nigeria

Since corruption has grown into a leviathan and has been fully absorbed and ingrained in the chemistry to Nigerians, a drastic, holistic and hydra-headed option of combat must be employed to deal with it decisively.

In the first place the tax laws in Nigeria must be reviewed and amended to tighten the noose around the neck of corrupt persons. Alo & Faniran (2005) believe that bad rules and ineffective taxation system make it difficult to track down people's financial activities and they breed corruption.

Government should rise to the occasion and arrest the drift in the national economy. There is widespread poverty in Nigeria today because of unemployment, underemployment and, in some cases, underpayment. Infrastructure like power (energy) good roads, effective transport system, national security etc which should drive a productive economy are sadly absent in Nigeria. Fortunately, the problem of power is being addressed now. With that problem solved, several avenues for employment (at small scale level) and productivity will open up.

Perhaps the greatest weapon to fight corruption is effective leadership which, in turn, engenders good governance. Our leaders must be politically committed to fight the scourge. If leaders ascend the ladder of political authority with the conspiracy of corruption and yet live and practice corruption, it will be most difficult, if not absolutely impossible, to make a headway in the fight against corruption. The judicial system in Nigeria especially in relation to cases of corruption requires an overhaul. Unnecessary delays by way of adjournments make the fight against corruption look like a child's play. The laws should be tinkered with in such a way that officials accused of corruption are expeditiously tried and punished appropriately.

It is hereby advocated that the immunity clause at all levels, should be expunged from our law books. That way the President, Vice President, Senators, Representatives and Governors can be readily held accountable for offences and other infractions. Four years is too long to wait for justice.

One can go on and on, *ad infinitum*, *ad nauseam* but if Nigerian leadership studiously and conscientiously accepts these thoughts and those of other well-meaning thinkers and scholars, we might yet win the battle against corruption and enthrone good governance whose attendant beneficial effects will redound to the good of Nigerians.

I conclude this paper by bringing to our attention the prophetic position of Achebe (2012).

“Corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage, and Nigeria will die if we continue to pretend that she is only slightly indisposed” pp. 249.

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