

CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: A REVIEW OF ITS CAUSES AND IMPACT

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Introduction

Corruption according to the Longman Dictionary of contemporary English is to make morally bad; cause to change from good to bad. It is also to influence person especially a public official improperly. Thus, corruption is a wicked immoral act involving dishonesty, or the state of changing something from 'good' to 'bad'. Even when a language is changed from the pure form to an adulterated one, by means of borrowing is corruption of that language. This paper is concern with the state of interaction between human beings in Nigeria, politically, economically, socially and religiously.¹ Many people, from the scholars or academicians to the laymen tend to look at corruption from the side of the rulers or ruling class. So, they will define corruption from the political angle, while some will look at the economic point of view like the Marxist, the social scientist will look at the social relations between individuals where the religious scholars will look at the moral point of view. Our discussion is not meant to define corruption but to look at the causes and impact of corruption. From whatever point of view, corruption is showing diversion, or breakage of a system. Corruption is found everywhere and at all time.

Causes of corruption in Nigeria

Scarcity and monopoly when demand is higher than supply the economists say there is scarcity. This situation could be deliberate or real. With the rising population in the country, there is scarcity or shortages of consumer goods and even resources. These goods might be those produced locally or imported. In the case of imported items government placed restrictions and regulations. In such a situation, government official or those given the monopoly of imports or production tend to use such positions to demand for bribe from some people before giving them such items or services. Some people are forced to give bribe before gaining employment; another example is the petroleum scarcity being experienced in Nigeria from time to time.

Broad Discretionary powers when the leader is not having authority but crude power, we say it is dictatorship. It is the absence of democracy. In such a situation, there is no transparency or accountability. Nigeria has witnessed this, both in the civilian and military regimes. Even today, one will be thinking that, we are leaving in a military rule. Those of us from Borno will attest to this. In fact, at Plateau State, Taraba and Niger delta, Nigerians have seen brute use of force by the military and uncountable corrupt practices by the uniform men that need no repetition. In short, there is no rule of law in the late 1980's; the disappearance of \$12.5 billion of oil of oil windfall from the gulf war was reported. We saw personalisation of government affairs from the military regimes to present civilian governments. Many governors use public funds like personal accounts. According to Rtd Gen. Muhammadu Buhari:

There is overriding need today to subject relevant public accounts to the scrutiny of auditors. Though there has not been much of auditing within the last decade or so, ostensibly because the accounts themselves are not being prepared, the lack of independence for the auditor severally limits what he can cover or what query he can expect to have answered.²

Income: expenditure gap is another cause of corruption

The current extremely low wages/salaries which called for many crisis/strikes by the public service in Nigeria are a great factor. In the last nationwide strike on oil subsidy removal, the renowned lawyer and activist in channel TV, Femi Alana analysed the oil revenue and asked the question, where is the excess of about NI2trillion? The minimum wage of NI 8,000.00 has not been realized up to date in Nigeria. We have varying salary scales from HATIS to CONSTISS to some yet unknown scales. Many a salary earner cannot satisfy his basic needs and that of family ranging from education feeding clothing, health care etc. This has given room for widespread corruption in the country.

Insecurity or uncertainty in office: This generally applies to the ‘big men’ who occupy top positions as public servants. They feel insecure and uncertainty of their permanency in office. This could arise from their lack of qualification, fear of molestation from politicians. As a result of this state of uncertainty they try to grab as much as they can within the opportune time at their disposal. Thus, they demand for bribes, corruption, kickbacks, looting etc. so that, they can lead a ‘comfortable life after vacating such offices. In fact, the people at the lower class never help matters because they ignorantly say that, a person occupying such office must get rich, if not he will never get it. The junior staff also copied the example set by their seniors an example was given of an accountant who invented a false voucher, his junior attached a smaller claims. When the officer saw two vouchers, he called what is the other for? The junior staff answered, it is the junior brother of the first! This is how corruption has become institutionalised in the country.

Weak administrative control: Embezzlement and looting of public funds is s widespread, that we do not have worry about details. The creation of ghost workers, delay of payment in order to get interest in the banks, deliberate increases of certain expenditures etc. are few of the corrupt practices. The creation of the code of conduct bureau (CCB), independent corrupt practices and other related offences commission

(ICPC) and economic and financial crimes Commission (EFCC) are agencies established with complimentary and same objective to curtail corruption in Nigeria. Yet, they were able to achieve the said objective, it is not the scope of this paper to address or assess their failure or otherwise. But suffice to say that, of leaders are not sincere and seem to be selected in their approach must have greatly contributed to the failure.

Weak sanctions: Related to above, in the attitude of government to provide deterring laws. We agreed and pointed above, that corruption happen all over the world. But in some countries, there are harsh laws enacted by their governments, while in ours it is so mild. In China, a public servant cannot use public facilities for his personal advantage, while in Nigeria it is the norm. “The six month sentence given to Balogun was a clear mockery of justice and an encouragement to officials to steal and indulge in the perpetuation of corruption”.³ The recent cases of Andrew Yakubu former NNPC boss and the former Minister of Petroleum resources Diezani Alison-Madueke have shown that we are not learning lessons due to weak sanctions.

Personal need/the capitalist accumulation syndrome: Some people simply tend to have an unrestrained desire to get rich overnight by hook or crook. They do not believe or depend on their salaries; in fact salaries are just to be saved. They only eat from the ‘dailies’ i.e. what they get are bribes. It is this attitude, which made Mrs Farida Waziri of the EFCC to accuse some of the MPs (Members of the Parliaments) of Kleptomania or their psyche. This was because of huge or colossal amount accumulated by some greedy members. The cases of Hamid Ali Custom’s boss and Ibrahim Magu the EFCC Chairman are a pointer to the battle between corrupt members of the House and citizens who are determine to fight corruption. This also applies to majority of Nigerians, who do not get satisfied with the little, hence falling into the corruption trap. Satisfaction according to the Hadith is “the satisfaction of the heart”.

Cumbersome Bureaucracy: The complex and complicated written and unwritten procedural laws, causes many delay, headache and suffering. In most of the government establishments you find out that things are not straightforward even the enlightened and educated find things difficult what more of the illiterate? Thus, in order to get ease, people resort to corrupt practices. This type of corruption has become widespread, from the smallest service.

Reward system: It would be total injustice to accuse all public officers of corruption, i.e. generalisation. There are many people who remain honest, humble and dedicated to their duty. However, the system of recognition in Nigeria remains faulty. Some nationals were recognised and given awards, but even this is politicised. We always have the 'big men' honoured but not the smaller junior officials. The corruption we are discussing knows no class. The prophet in the Hadith, said, the giver and receiver of bribe is cursed! The giver may be a junior or small person looking for justice or his right. The receiver is the big shot. So when the giver does not give, how will the receiver get it? The scholars have given relieve to one who is forced to give, in order to get justice or right. At any rate the society ought to give recognition to people who abstain from corrupt practices and are exposing the corrupt ones like the whistle - blowers. They need all kind of protection and encouragement. The point one is making is that, the good ones if not honoured may likely join the bad ones.

Opportunity to engage in corruption with impunity when officials can get the opportunity to involve in corruption without detection and sanction, they can do it. Tanzania's Dr. Julius Nyerere, said everybody including himself, had "to account for everything they owned and there was no opportunity for siphoning looted funds abroad, since national banks would not facilitate it and political leaders and officials did not have the opportunity to transfer millions abroad".⁴ While in Nigeria, officials are aided and go scotch free!

Ignorance even though, some scholars are of the view that ignorance of the law is not an excuse. But I tend to look at a situation of their information. This happens in lot of ways. The various laws and enactments are not well circulated. There is no free flow of information. We are leaving in the world of it. But how many have access to information cheaply? The energy with which to access information is not there, no right, no genuine accessories etc. How many of us, have the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in their personal libraries? How many have the code of conduct act? etc. I remember last three or four years, academic and non-academic Staff of the University was brought before the judicial panel of the code of conduct. How many government officials or leaders appeared before it, or have declared their assets? After their tenure who ever care to find out or cross check the declaration? How many a civil servant ever saw the civil service rule? In fact how many understand it? Recently, to be specific, last month we met at the ward level to address the problem of broken down PHCN transformer. A customer appealed to our conscience, that for three months, PHCN staff was not paid, so we need to 'contribute' for the installation of the transformer. After the meeting, I inquired but only to find out that, they do not owe even for a month. In the same week, I had an opportunity to interact with a retired senior civil servant of the state, who blatantly attacked a scholar for accusing the governor or government officials of stealing public funds. He said, the scholar was given an allocation of a house at the newly constructed housing unit, had a privilege of being a member of the Pilgrim Board etc from the government whom he accused of stealing like rats! Ignorance of laws or ignorance of the role one is supposed to perform in such situation is very clear.

The impact of corruption on Nigeria

Having seen the causes of corruption, we now turn our attention to the impact or effects of corruption on the Nigerian society, Ekumankama listed twelve (12) points as the effects of corruption on the people.⁵ As the economy and politics intertwined, we will for the convenience and purpose of this paper limit them to political economic, social and

religious impacts.

At the political and administrative level, it led to disrespect for constitutional institution, absence of rule of law, anti-democracy etc when there is no rule of law and disrespect for constitutional institutions, people become cynic towards the prevailing political system, With those anti-corruption codes cited above, and the claim by those in authority, of fighting corruption but go on looting and embezzling, hope is lost. Yet, the leaders become more determine to remain in office, in order to continue their evil act. The military have shown us this and even the civilian successors are not that better.

Administratively, corruption affected all organs of the government. Today, civil servants are more concern with their personal gain than public functions. Some departments are more ‘honoured’ because of their ‘greasy’ environment, while others are seen as ‘dry’ and therefore very unpopular because they lack or offer no corruption. Thus, you find some staff resisting their posting from such places, while others trying their best to move to such greener areas. This has negative impact on the moral of the staff both the corrupt and honest ones.

On the economic level or sector, corruption has resulted to large-scale diversion of resources from public to private interest. There is diversion of funds meant for development to the pocket of individuals. We have shortages in water supply, inadequate health facilities, poor housing, poor electricity and bad roads (or roads are death trap). There is serious inflation of contracts, a governor once wanted to ‘assist’ an ex-governor, so was given contract. The ex-governor evaluated the project, added all cost involved, but the contract was inflated. When he refused to accept, it was doubled and given to someone. The traditional and previously well-observed regulations and procedures of contracting have been abandoned. The greed, fraud, capital flight and other corrupt vices had serious devastating effect on the economy.

Social impact It leads to weakening of moral integrity and credibility of persons, institutions and government.⁶ The fundamental human rights of individuals have been trampled upon, when government agencies unjustly punish the innocent and assist the culprit to escape scot-free. People are clearly seeing the big-men' enjoying at the expense of the poor, down trodden masses. The last government of Alhaji Ali Modu Sheriff was said to have left some billions in the coffers. But this is a government that never paid to receive counter-funding in the federation account. While the state remains educationally backward, total neglect of all facilities, deterioration in the life of the citizens. In fact, few governors have performed well throughout the federation generally, it is the corrupt that live well and fat, when the honest and general members of the society become poor and lead a miserable life.

In the religious field, corruption has entered deeply and caused all kinds of havoc in the Nigerian society. As evidently posited by the renowned historian Yusuf Bala Usman of the blessed memory, "Manipulation of religion". Religion in Nigeria is allowed to be manipulated because it was allowed to be a no man's land. We have various associations, groups and societies, with their registration, structure etc. Today, you cannot claim to be a lawyer or medical practitioner without the licences and the qualification certificate. But in religion, people can easily establish their mosque or church without any censorship. One can vividly recall, the 'trials, of brother Jero' it is a play by the Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka, counting the travails of the churches. In short, religion has its own share of corruption in Nigeria and it has seriously impacted on the society. Today's Boko-Haram is a clear example. Even the name Boko-haram is depicting corruption in educational system. This has its origin in the kind of education some people received:

The Saudi authority embarked on mass suspension of scholars and preachers and ordered them to go for a re-education programme. Over 1000 preachers have been suspended so far. Some of the Saudi Shaykhs that only recently were seen as the most ardent and committed to Islamic authenticity, and who had a very popular following, have withdrawn their Fatwas, declared publicly that they were wrong.

Conclusion

We have attempted a definition of corruption, its causes and impact in this paper corruption is seen as not only an economic, political or social syndrome. But, from a holistic perspective, there is corruption in all societies and in all ages, caused by varying forces. But in most cases due to shortages, greed, injustice or ignorance. The cankerworm had devastating impact on Nigerians, politically, economically, socially and religiously.

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