

**A Historical Analysis of the Bane of Corruption on Nigeria's
Socio-Economic Development, 1960-2015**

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ABSTRACT

Undoubtedly, corruption remains a major aberrant that has taken several dimensions since Nigeria gained her political independence in 1960. Although, corruption is not a new phenomenon, its dimension especially since the birth of the Fourth Republic has become worrisome. It has become a major cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society. Its manifestations include diversion and misappropriation of funds, mismanagement and outright embezzlement of fund, inflation of contracts, money laundry and so on. Extant literature on corruption has neglected the bane of it and has focused on assessing the factors for corruption and efforts at combating it in Nigeria. This paper seeks to analyse the bane of corruption on Nigeria's socioeconomic development from independence to 2015. The paper examines the concept of corruption from different perspectives, history of corruption in Nigeria, causes and effects of corruption on the socio-economic development of Nigeria and the efforts at combating the evil menace in Nigeria. It concludes that there can never be a meaningful socio-economic development in a highly corrupt society. Therefore, the paper submits that punitive punishment should not only be meted on corrupt people in order to serve as deterrent to others, but also the anti-graft agencies should be strengthened and empowered by the law to prosecute corrupt people. The methodological approach adopted in this work is historical, thematic, and analytical. Source comprises primary and secondary materials, oral interviews, newspapers and extant literature.

Keyword: Corruption, Socio- Economic Development, Democratic Dispensation, Nigeria

Introduction

Corruption is a cancer that has eaten deeply into the fabric of Nigerian society. The general global perception about the scion in Nigeria is that it is generally acknowledged that corrupt practices are endemic and systemic in both public and private sectors of Nigeria. From the forgoing it is evident that corruption undermines the country's integrity and security. It also poses serious economic challenges being responsible for the poverty of the populace. Public funds meant for the development of all sectors in the country ends up in few hands, the citizens pay the price. This has resulted in the absence of social amenities such as portable water, electricity and good roads. The populace is demoralized and become willing tools to be used as sabotages to the state. It has led to the extinction of institutions of national significance and pride such as Nigerian Airways, National Shipping Lines, Steel Rolling Mills, Nigerian Telecommunication Limited, Car Assembly Plants and other public and private industries. This has led to high level of crime in the country making it not attractable to foreign investors.

The Concept of Corruption: Definition

This paper provides a conceptual clarification of the term corruption as an uncertain and indeed devoid of any strait jacket definition. What is corruption? Etymologically, the word corrupt is from a mid - 14 century ord corruptus meaning "contaminate, impair the purity of" It also emanated from the French mid - 14 century word corrupt "unhealthy, to destroy, spoil, seduce, bribe"¹ If you are a typical Nigerian, you would define corruption as government officials looting our treasury. One would view that everything starts and ends in government offices. It will surprise you that almost everybody is campaigning against corruption in Nigeria. We are all waging a war against corruption.

¹ <http://www.Etymonline.com> term corrupt Accessed on 28 July 2024

The main reason Nigeria is not making progress is that those in government are just stealing public money. Corruption in Nigeria is not the exclusive preserve of politicians, civil servants, and captains of industries alone. Among the “common people” there is an instinctive element of stealing skills. One should stop thinking people suddenly become corrupt when they join the government. However having been tutored and mentored on petty stealing from probably childhood, Nigerians naturally explode when they occupy positions of authority at any level either in private or public sector. To Ejovi and etal (2013) corruption is the conscious act by a person or group of persons to appropriate by unlawful means the wealth of another person or group of persons.² To others it is the act of turning power and authority into ready cash. To yet another group, it is the diversion of resources for the betterment of the community to the gain of individuals at the expense of the community.

Konie (2003) identified two types of corruption, these are: Vertical corruption, which involves managers and decision makers. This is common in less developed countries and; Horizontal corruption, which involves the entire officials, informed and laymen groups in the society. The two types of corruption should be seriously addressed adicated if any meaningful economic or political progress is to be made³.

The pertinent question here is: How does corruption gradually emerge in Nigeria and become the bane of our socio-economic development?

History of corruption in Nigeria

A historical perspective of corruption in Nigeria begins with seeing it as a form of anti-social behaviour by an individual or social group which confers unjust or fraudulent benefits in its perpetrators. This is inconsistent with the established legal norms and prevailing moral ethos of the land and is likely to subvert or diminish the capacity of the legitimate authorities to provide fully for the material and spiritual well-being of all members of society in a just and equitable manner.⁴ It should be noted that corruption was not invented by, nor is it peculiar to Nigerians. It is a global issue with deep historical roots. Corruption in Nigeria during colonial period started from petty thievery to armed robbery sequel to the mode of capital production, appropriation and accumulation and exploitation that was dominated by the monolithic and oligopolistic practices of major British trading firms. Nigerian peasant farmers and other petty producers via unequal terms of trade made the white to be rich and the black to be poor. This however resulted only in the cosmetic transformation both of the mode of capital accumulation and the structure of governance.⁵

During decolonization era, 1952-1960, power sharing arrangement or partnership was put in place between colonial master and their monopoly enterprise on the other hand and the fledging Nigerian bourgeoisie on the other hand. The various positions given the indigenous educated elites opened the door to new form of corrupt and individual financial accumulation to major members of the Nigerian ruling class. It is the period of decolonization that the payment of “ten percent” and “kickbacks” dates before performing the duty for which they were already being paid fabulous salaries and allowances from the public account.

At independence, 1960-1966 the need to solve the central problem of dearth of private capital by broadening their accumulative base through exploiting maximally the public wealth of the state which was previously unavailable to indigenous politicians led to dubious and fraudulent form of primitive private accumulation at public expense. Under the leadership of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister, and Nnamdi Azikwe, the President, the country was marked by widespread corruption. Government officials looted public funds with impunity. Federal Representatives and Ministers flaunted their wealth with reckless abandon. The situation described above, among other factors provided the pretext for a group of middle-rank army officers to sack the Nigerian First Republic through a coup d’etat on 15th January, 1966 on the ground of corruption.

The military rule of 1966-1975 laid the foundation of kleptocracy. The General Aguiyi Thomas Ironsi military regime that replaced the sacked civilian regime instituted a series of commissions of inquiry to investigate the activities of some government parastatals and to probe the widespread corruption that characterised the public service sector of the deposed regime. The reports on parastatals revealed that a number of ministers formed companies and used their influence to secure contracts. Moreover, they were found guilty of misappropriation of funds as well as disregarding laid down procedures in the award of contracts by parastatals under their ministries.⁶ The Gowon regime quickly settled down to its own project of stripping the state through different forms of primitive and fraudulent accumulation as against the aim of eradicating corruption from governance by the politicians. The Nigerian civil war June 1967 - January 1970 provided sensational opportunities for unlawful enrichment. Apart from mismanagement of the economy,

² Ejovi, A. and etal (2013). Corruption in Nigeria : A Historical Perspective, Research on Humanities and Social Sciences Vol. 3 No. 16

³ Konle, G. (2003). National Reconciliation. The Post, A Zambian Newspaper Wed. July 23. No. 2471, pp: 11

⁴ Ejovi, A. and etal (2013). Corruption in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* Vol. 3 No 16

⁵ Falowo, A. S.(2016). Economic Development in Akokoland, Southwestern Nigeria, 1900-1980. Ph.D Thesis, History, Arts. University of Ibadan. p.3

⁶ Okoronwo, R. (2007). Corruption in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective, 1947-2002. African Unchained <http://www.africaunchained.blogspot.com/corruption-in-nigeriahistorical.html>. Accessed 28th July 2017

the Gowon regime was enmeshed in deep-seated corruption. The phenomenon of corruption attained a distinct and higher stage of development during the nine years of Gowon's administration. By 1974, reports of unaccountable wealth of Gowon's military governors and other public officials had become the crux of discussion in the various Nigerian dailies. Thus, in 1975 the regime was overthrown by General Muritala Muhammad through a palace coup d'état. Thus, the coup of 1975, among other things, was an attempt to eradicate corruption in Nigeria. General Muritala started by declaring his assets and asking all government officials to follow suit. Following the probe panel that was constituted in 1975, ten of the twelve state governors in the Gowon regime were found guilty of corruption. The guilty officers were dismissed from the military services with ignominy. They were also forced to give ill-acquired properties considered to be in excess of their earnings.⁷ In the same manner, the Belgore commission of inquiry on "Cement Armada" discovered that the Ministry of Defence inflated the contract for private profit at a great cost to the government. In its Report, the Commission noted that the Ministry of Defence needed only 2.9 million tons of cement at a cost of #52million as against the 16 million metric tons of cement, it requested for, at a cost of #557 million.⁸ Similar commissions of inquiry were constituted by the new state governments which result in the immediate dismissal of several corrupt officials, many of who were in turn ordered to refund the money they had stolen. The regime of Obasanjo of 1976-1979 was not different as there was no satisfactory explanation as to how the generation of army officers many of whom served for twenty years or less came with such gargantuan fortunes.

The circumstances and conditions under which politicians of the second Republic acceded to power in 1979 ensured corrupt enrichment at the very top of political agenda. These circumstances included the constitutional order on registration of national political parties and election to various offices at all levels of government.⁹

The Shagari administration was marked by spectacular government corruption, as the President did nothing to stop the looting of public funds by elected officials. It was claimed that over £16billion in oil revenues were lost between 1979 and 1983 during the reign of President Shehu Shagari. No politician symbolized the looting and avarice under Shagari's government more than his combative Transport Minister, Alhiji Umaru Dikko, who was alleged to have mismanaged about #4billion of public fund meant for the importation of rice. Another arsenal for looting the fund of Nigeria during this era was the appointing of liaison officers to lobby members of legislative arms to support legislative projects sponsored by the executive arms at various levels of governance.

However, on 31st December 1983, General Muhammadu Buhari led a popular coup that again rescued the economy from the grip of corrupt politicians of the Second Republic. The 1983 coup was carried out with the aim of halting corruption and restoring discipline, integrity and dignity to public life. General Buhari and Idiagbon promised to bring corrupt officials and their agents to book. Consequently, state governors and commissioners were arrested and brought before tribunals of inquiry. The military Buhari of regime, which scarcely showed respect for human rights in its bid to entrench discipline and sanity in public life, was toppled by General Ibrahim Babangida in a bloodless palace coup on August 27, 1985. The next regime for thirteen years saw no serious attempt to stop corruption. If anything, corruption reached an alarming rate and became institutionalized during Babangida's regime.

The second coming of the military 1985 - 1999 saw the development of corruption to its highest peak in Nigeria. During Babangida's eight years in power there was the pervasive culture of impunity. IBB introduced the "Settlement Strategy". No serious attempt was instituted to stop corruption. If anything, corruption reached an alarming rate and became institutionalized during Babangida's regime. In the face of series of protests and opposition to his rule, Babangida reluctantly set-aside to a non-elected military-civilian Interim National Government on 26th August 1993 which was later overthrown by the military of General Sanni Abacha on November 18, 1993.

The Abacha's regime which was born out of corruption continued until he died in office in 1998. Under General Abacha, corrupt practices became blatant and systemic. General Abacha and his family alongside his associates looted Nigeria's treasury with reckless abandon. The extent of Abacha's venality seemed to have surpassed that of other notorious African leaders like Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire. It was estimated that the embezzlement of public funds and corruption proceeds of General Abacha and his family amounted to USD4billion.¹⁰ The corrupt nature and financial recklessness of the Bbangida era was detailed in the Okigbo Panel Report of 1994. The 1994 Okigbo Panel Report on the Reorganisation and Reform of the Central Bank of Nigeria indicted former Military President, General Ibrahim Babangida, former Head of State, late General Sanni Abacha, and former Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, the late Alhaji Abdulkadir Ahmed, for mismanaging about USD 12.4 billion oil windfall between 1988 and 1994. A summary of the panel's report submitted to the Federal Government revealed that General Ibrahim Babangida's regime

⁷ Maduagwu, M. O. quoted from J. O. Ogunniyi & etal (2016). *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences* Vol. 9 No1 An Assessment of Factors that Promotes Corruption Amongst Public Office Holders in Nigeria

⁸ M. O. Afolabi (1993). May-June. A Bibliography of the Nigerian Governments' Commissions of Inquiry Reports and Accompanying White Papers from 1920 to 1986. *Government Publications Review* Vol. 20, Issue 3. 297-358

⁹ Falola, T. and Ihonvbere, T. (1985). *The Rise and Fall of Nigeria's Second Republic; 1979-1983*, London. Zed Books pp. 29-30.

¹⁰ International Centre for Assets Recovery. Sanni Abacha. September 2009 <http://www.assetrecovery.org/Accessed on 2nd August, 2017>

conspired with top officials of the Central Bank of Nigeria to squander the entire fortune on unproductive or dubious projects.¹¹ The Report also indicted him of authorizing the dedication of crude oil of 65,000 barrels per day (bpd) for the finance of special priority projects including Ajaokuta Iron & Steel, Itakpe Iron Mining, and Shiroro Hydro-electric projects. The quantity was subsequently increased to 105,000 barrels per day and in 1994 to 150,000 barrels per day. Even in 1990, the nation was unable to account for the proceeds from petroleum exports up to the tune of USD 1.2 Billion. As thus, the government which is expected to curb corruption thrives most in government, wasting of resources, defeating all prospects of democracy and development. People see appointment into public office as a way of looting the treasury, hence no faith in public morality.

This trend has remained a major and directive principle of state and national policy and continued to sap the vitality of Nigerian National economy and the creativity of Nigerian people. Even when Nigeria is back to civilian rule since 1999 there was no positive effort to eradicate it till 2016. Be that as it may be, the issue of corruption between 1999 to 2015 should be another focus for discussion since there were enormous cases of corrupt practices. However, the case of Federal Ministers that allegedly stole more than #23 billion from the public coffers during Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's regime was still very fresh and should serve as a case study. An audit report released by Vincent Azie, acting Auditor General of the Federation, showed that the amount represented financial frauds ranging from embezzlement, payments for jobs not done, over-invoicing, double debiting, to releasing of money without the consent of the approving authority to mention a few in ten major ministries. Rather than cautioning the ministers whose ministries were named in the fraud or invite the Independence Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) to further investigate the case, Vincent Azie was hastily retired by the Presidency for procedural offences.¹² Never the less, the anti-graft agencies established to fight the menace seemed to only concentrate on the "perceived" enemies of government in power. What are the geneses of this menace called corruption in Nigeria?

Causes of Corruption

Corruption, in whatever form, is a negation of ethical behavior as Ogbuehi connoted. He describes it as the code of moral principles that sets standards of good or bad, right or wrong in one's conduct and thereby guides the behaviour¹³

In Nigeria, there are several factors that encourages corruption and the outstanding one is bad leadership and followership. It has been on record that no country grew and enjoyed steady development in social, economic and political life without experiencing good and selfless political leadership and law abiding followership. This is because growth and development has always been an outcome of good governance and agile followers. Other reasons have been put forward as probable causes for the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria. This ranges from non-conformity to religious tenets, imported values and norms and ideas alien to our culture, ethnicity which encourages favouritism and nepotism, a weak legal system which is honoured in the bench than observance.

The political bureau in its report mentioned such causes as excessive materialism generated by our individual capitalist order which emphasize personal wealth without regard to the collective interest and welfare of the larger society. Other causes of corruption are poverty, illiteracy, get-rich- mania, statists and wrong attitude to public property, absence of a welfare scheme which cushions effect of unemployment, retirement phobia, large families and quest for power, double standards and low level of patriotism. These are important in themselves; it does appear that poverty is the most important single factor that promotes the wide spread of giving and taking bribes i.e. illegal financial inducements in the country. However those that are rich are also corrupt when they occupy private or public position of authority. Chobal and Daloz (1999) reasoned that in Africa, such factors as the obligations of mutual support, the imperatives of reciprocity, the importance of gift exchange, the payment of tribute, the need to redistribute, even the habits of cattle rustling or, more generally, of plundering others, all have a bearing on the continent today¹⁴. Does this ugly threat have impact on Nigeria's socio- economic development?

The Consequences of Corruption on Nigeria

The cost of corruption can be classified into four factors, political, economic, social, and environmental. On the political front corruption constitute a major obstacle to democracy and the rule of law. In a democratic system, offices and institution lose their legitimacy when they are misused for private advantage. This is harmful to our democracy. Our democracy and political leadership cannot develop in a corrupt climate. Economically, corruption leads to the depletion of our national wealth, it has led to the use of scarce public resources to finance uneconomic high profile projects such as power plants and pipelines that cost billions of dollars whereas if these were channel towards building schools, hospitals and roads or the supply of electricity and water to rural areas which are basic needs of life, would

¹¹ Okigbo Panel Report on the Re-organisation and Reform of the Central Bank of Nigeria 1994.

¹² Ogunniyi O. J. & Amosu, O. A. (2017). An Assessment of Factors that Promotes Corruption Amongst Public Office Holders in Nigeria, *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 9 No.1 p. 299

¹³ Ogbuehi, A. (1998). Promoting International Business Ethics and Integrity among Nigerian Managers. *Journal of Nigerian Institute of Management*. Vol. 34 Nos 2-3, April- December 1998

¹⁴ Chobal, P. etal (1999). *Africa Works: Disorder as political instrument*. James Currey, Oxford p.10.

improve the welfare of Nigerians. This has hindered the development of fair market structures which led to job losses and also affects investment. Corruption reduces economic growth, enhances inequalities and reduces the government's capacity to respond to people's needs. All these swerve down to create poverty in the society. Corruption distorts economic and social developments, by engendering wrong choices and by encouraging competition in bribery rather than in the quality and price of goods and services and all too often, it means that the world's poorest must pay for the corruption of their own officials and of multinational agents¹⁵.

On the social ladder, the people have lost their trust in the political system. In its institutions and leadership, they have developed non-challant attitude and general apathy towards government policies resulting in a weak civil society. Corruption leads to a grooving gap between the rich and the poor and deepens poverty by enriching a few at the expense of fellow citizens. Under a corrupt system, there is a concentration of wealth in the hands of a tiny minority of the population. Resultantly income distribution becomes highly skewed. Closely associated with the connection of wealth in the hands of the few, a distorted consumption pattern, aimed at meeting the luxurious lifestyle of the urban elite emerges¹⁶.

Efforts at combating corruption in Nigeria

Successive governments in Nigeria have put in place several anti- corrupt measures and strategies such as Ethical Reorientation Campaign of Shagari's Second Republic, War Against Indiscipline (WAI) of the Buhari/Idiagbon regime, Babangida's Committee on Corruption and other Economic Crimes and War Against Corruption¹⁷. Other efforts include setting up of probe panels, Commission of enquiry and tribunal (e.g. Failed Bank Tribunal) to try corrupt individuals. These did not achieve much result. The success or failure in Nigeria in fighting corruption became important for Nigeria and the people of Nigeria. If Nigeria failed then the cynics and the pessimists will have their day. They would take a stand that it is impossible to deal with corruption, so much that some people consider it a normal thing. If Nigeria succeeds in dealing with corruption, it will succeed in building a basis for prosperity and for democracy and for freedom in our polity. However, with the realization that political, economic and social development cannot be attained or sustained in Nigeria without first tackling or eradicating corruption, the then president of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo made the anti- corruption campaign a priority programme of his administration. This led to the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in 2003.

EFCC is an inter-agency commission comprising a 22-member Board drawn from all Nigerian Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) and regulators. The Commission is empowered to investigate, prevent, and prosecute offenders who engage in "Money laundering, embezzlement, bribery, looting, any form of child labour, illegal oil bunkering, illegal mining, tax evasion, foreign exchange and privacy, open market abuse, dumping of toxic waste, and prohibited goods"¹⁸. In addition, the EFCC is empowered to enforce all the pre-1999 anti- corruption and anti-money laundering laws. Punishment prescribed in the EFCC Act range from a combination of payment of fines, forfeiture of assets, and up to five years imprisonment, depending on the nature and gravity of the offence. Conviction for the terrorist financing and terrorist activities attracts life imprisonment. Its focus is to combat financial and economic crimes. The commission is empowered with various Acts to prevent, investigate, prosecute and penalize economic and financial crimes.

The challenge however is the emerging view that EFCC was used by the government to deal with perceived opponents and enemies. Some individuals questioned its failure in the National Assembly during the debate on the failed Constitutional Amendment which sought to extend the tenure of the president and state chief executives during the Obasanjo administration. A member of the first group is Ghali NaAbba former Speaker of the House of Representative and now Governor of Katsina State. He argued that a pattern appears established where anti- corruption agencies in Nigeria are not allowed to work independently. It is observed that the tendency to send people to face these institutions is when somebody is against the administration. It was accused of not respecting the rule of law. The introduction of whistle blowers is another effort of tackling corruption by the Buhari administration. Several Billion of Nigerian Naira and foreign currencies have been recovered via the whistle blowers reports.

Since corruption continues to be a threat to the growth and development of Nigeria, there is the need to develop a clear way of dealing with the problem. Below are some of the recommendations:

There is the need to have open policy on governance, a situation where one person serves as accounting officer on government expenditure should be eradicated for accountability in government's Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). This will help to curb one man show in governance.

¹⁵ Langseth, P. et al (1997). The Role of a National Integrity System in Fighting Corruption. EDI Working paper. The World Bank, Washington, D. C.

¹⁶ Interview held with Olorunmo Richard Adelakun (Former Chairman Akoko South East Local Government, Ondo State) aged 60 at Ipe Akoko on 22/10/2016

¹⁷ Diamond, L. (1997). Political corruption: Nigeria's Perennial Struggle. *Journal of Democracy* 2(4): 102

¹⁸ Section 26, EFCC Act, 2004

Finally government should be pro-active in the recovery of funds and other looted properties from those found guilty by the special courts to serve as deterrent to others. Those found guilty should be sentenced to life Imprisonment or be executed as it is done in China. Immunity clause should be abrogated to investigate serving executives.

Conclusions

The most tragic effect of corruption on Nigeria has been the failure of the country to attain its economic potentials. Despite its substantial natural and human resources, Nigeria remains desperately poor, due to bad management of its wealth by successive corrupt governments. Today, Nigeria is one of the poorest countries in the world. The per capita GNP PPP (purchasing power parity) figure of \$820 looks better at first glance but it ranks 199th out of the 209 countries covered in the World Bank's 2000 World Development Report.¹⁹ In 2010, Nigeria's GDP per capita (PPP) of \$2,365 ranked as 138th in the world out of the 180 countries, while the GNI per capita (PPP) of \$2,160 left the country in the 172nd position out of the 215 countries listed in the World Development Indicators Database.²⁰

In the final analysis, the greatest challenge facing Nigeria as a country is the problem of poverty and that of underdevelopment. Put succinctly, long years of bad leadership and even dictatorial governance has left the country badly damaged coupled with the endemic issue of corruption. This paper concludes that moral and financial indiscipline and other manifestations of corruption must be significantly reduced in order to get close to the 21st century development goals and ensure quality infrastructures in Nigeria. The proliferation of corrupt public officers is politically destabilizing. It also affects investment, economic growth, and government expenditure choices. Bribery and corruption, the culture of late payment, delays or refusal of payment for services already rendered do scare away investors. Thus, corruption discourages honest effort and valuable economic activities; and it breeds inefficiency and nepotism. With the advent of the President Muhammadu Buhari²¹ led-administration and its stance against corruption, let us keep our fingers crossed:

Recommendations

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¹⁹ See *The News* August 2, 1999 Issues, Vol.13 No 4, See also *The Tell Magazine* August 9, 1999

²⁰ Olajuyigbe, G. (1999). Letter of the Week: Nigeria's democracy is endangered *The News*, 1999 No 13 :6

²¹ Ogunniyi, O. J. (2017).An Assessment of Factors that Promotes Corruption Amongst Public Office Holders in Nigeria *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences*. Vol. 19 No1 p. 299.

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