

Corruption as a Developmental Challenge in Nigeria

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Abstract

Corruption is a critical problem in Nigeria that requires a new approach since it is fast killing the development of all sectors. Economic development in Nigeria has been slower than expected. Poverty, currency-devaluation, poor health care, insecurity, power failure, and lack of water supply are consequential effects of corruption. Hence, this paper attempts to delve into this problem by shedding light on past efforts of different governments; identifying and illustrating the major types of corruption in Nigeria and proposing a policy solution to find an effective solution by carrying the citizens along. It is observed that most Nigerian citizens do not understand the implications of corruption as a killer act. With proper orientation, all hands will be on deck to curb the menace. More severe punishments such as capital death sentences and life sentences need to be introduced into the anti-corruption policy to curb corrupt leaders and individuals in Nigeria.

Keywords: Corruption; Economy; Development; Policy; Law; Nigeria

Abbreviations: ICPC: Independent Corrupt Practices Commission; EFCC: Economic and Financial Crime Commission; NNPC: Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation; NDIC: Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation; FMHDS: Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Social Development and Disaster Management; INEC: Independent Electoral Commission's; IReV: INEC Election Results Viewer; SON: Standard Organisation of Nigeria; NAFDAC: National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control; NGOs: Non-governmental organisations

Introduction

This paper presents corruption as a developmental challenge in Nigeria. Nigeria is a country of about 190 million people in West Africa and "the second largest country in Africa" Ajodo-Adebanjoko & Okorie [1]. Several problems came with Nigeria's independence in 1960 and one of the problems that still ravage the country is corruption Yagboyaju [2]. Corruption dominates discourses of Nigeria internationally and nationally as Yusuf [3] describes Nigeria as the most corrupt nation in Africa. This is a negative description of the country, but the fact is the problem of corruption has become a common issue in Nigeria as a major percentage of her citizens suffer despite the abundance of human and mineral resources Yagboyaju [2]; Maina, & Abdulrazak [4].

Corruption is derived from the Greek word "corropius" which implies aberration. Even though there are various definitions of corruption, they still share related ideas. It is imperative to state that corruption is defined according to different views. A few of the definitions are identified and utilized for this paper. Corruption is regarded as the process by which an individual takes possession of what does not belong to them Mohammed

[5]. Corrupt practices are behaviours that deviate from the norm Akindele [6] especially when people are entrusted with positions or power. In the international space, corruption is referred to as the abuse or misuse of power for private benefits or gains Osakede, Ijimakina, Adesanya, Ojo, Ojikutu, Abubarka [7]. Also, corruption is regarded as a synonym for related words such as settlement, embezzlement, bribery, fraud etc. Indeed, using public positions for personal benefits is corruption Adebanjoko & Okorie [1].

In the same vein, corruption is defined as the act of siphoning resources that are meant for development by converting for personal gain which leads to capital leakage, poverty, and poor infrastructure that affects growth and development Adewale [8]. Also, corruption is a systematic evil in the form of "favouritism, nepotism, tribalism, sectionalism, undue enrichment, amassing of wealth, abuse of office, power, position and derivation of undue gains and benefits" to the disadvantage of others or society Lawal [9]. The last two definitions aptly capture the view in this paper because it borders on corruption in Nigeria's context. Corruption

is “as old as Nigeria” and can be traced to the colonial era Aluko [10]; Omotola [11]. It has gradually become a monster and cankerworm that has eaten deep into the development of the country Okereka [12]. The more governance transits from one leadership to another, the more people realize unimaginable cases of corruption. Aiyetan [13] and Mohammed (2009) observed that corruption exists in the tiers and all levels of government, and private sectors too.

Democracy returned to Nigeria in 1999 and efforts have been made to curb the hydra-headed menace of corruption. These efforts include public reforms and the establishment of anti-corruption agencies such as the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC). The anti-graft agencies fighting corruption in Nigeria were the innovations of Former President Olusegun Obasanjo’s administration (1999-2006). Notably, these agencies achieve the trial of corrupt individuals and the recovery of public funds. Yet, this is still a far cry from the ideal situation and Nigeria and the majority of its citizens are experiencing developmental setbacks Yusuf [3]. No wonder, Andrig and Fjelstad (2011) perceive corruption as a difficult issue affecting various departments in the public sector and private sector.

Moreover, ranking Nigeria as a highly corrupt country in Africa and globally is not only a problem but an issue of concern for all of Nigeria Igbuzor [14]. Hence, a review of this problem and recommendation of policy solutions are based on a critical analysis of the implications of corruption on the development of Nigeria and efforts in curbing this problem because the projection of every researcher should be geared towards eradicating corruption Andrig & Fjelstad [15].

Corruption as a Developmental Challenge in Nigeria

Corruption is likened to cancer that is killing development in Nigeria Maina, & Abdulrazak [4]. There is a relationship between corruption and development. Development is a systemic social change that leads to “better production methods and improved social arrangement Lawal [9]. It is further asserted that development is about improving the social and economic situations of people to enable them to enjoy a good standard of living Maina & Abdulrazak [4].

Sustainable development refers to the way of ensuring current and future needs of people in each society are met Osakede [7]. It is further emphasized that the rate of corruption is one of the major factors that influenced development aside from leadership and political principles. This position indicates that the rate of corruption will either improve development or decrease. Indeed, corruption has slowed down development in Nigeria. To Ogonnaya [16], corruption leads to regressive economic growth, misallocation of human and material resources, limited aid flow, loss of tax revenue, budget failure, poor infrastructure and public services and negative expenditure. Corruption, also, causes insecurity which in turn affects development Adebajoko

& Okorie [1] while the state of infrastructure is worrisome Idris, & Salisu [17]. To clarify this, the corruption rate in Nigeria is higher than in most developed countries. It is noted that Nigeria is not the only country that is affected by corruption Nageri, Umar & Abdul [18] but there are pieces of evidence that Nigeria is notorious for corruption, and it has affected almost everyone. There have been efforts to euphemise corruption in Nigeria, especially among those that benefit from it such as the police force where corruption is popularly known as “settlement” and this attempt has gradually permeated other sectors including education, judiciary, politics, and civil service. Bearing the brunt of corruption includes those who even think they are benefiting from it.

For a proper understanding of corruption as a developmental challenge in Nigeria, there is a need to examine the types of corruption and relate them to the Nigerian situation. Osakede [15] note there are two basic categories of corruption; private and public corruption while Tolu & Ogunro [19], and Nageri [18] agreed that types of corruption are moral, economic, political, and electoral. This will guide the discussion of corruption as a developmental challenge in this paper.

Moral Corruption

Moral corruption erodes social values Lawal [9] to an extent that people begin to normalise corrupt practices by bribing through sexual perversion and unethical acts to gain favour. Thereby, undermining due process and rightful practices. The spread of fake news and hate speech in Nigeria especially on social media is an indicator of moral corruption. Moreover, instances of moral corruption abound in Nigeria, especially in non-adherence to the rule of law. Nnamdi Kanu is still being detained by the government after the Appeal court cleared him of all charges on 13 October 2023. Yet, he was not granted bail as the government proceeded to the Supreme Court. When law is not effective, as it should be, due to the influence of few people, this constitutes moral corruption Maina, & Abdulrazak [4].

Economic Corruption

Any corrupt practice that inhibits economic development is economic corruption. Nigeria is blessed with natural resources such as crude oil, gold, bitumen, rubber, etc yet there is no equivalent development Nageri Umar, & Abdul [18]. Oil blocks are allocated to the influential in the country while crude oil and gold are illegally mined. Instances of economic corruption abound in the industry. Many business investors left Nigeria for other countries because of corruption. After sixty-three years of independence, most major cities in Nigeria still do not experience constant power supply. The removal of existing or non-existing fuel subsidies has further discouraged business investors who could have relied on power generators for their operations as the cost of petroleum products keeps increasing. Under the administration of President Goodluck Jonatha, the Minister for Economy and Finance and CBN governor had issues over unremitted funds by the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) into the CBN

account Osakede [7]. To date, nobody has been tried over the matter and the unremitted funds went to people in power who used their positions for personal gains. The fund would have been channelled to developmental projects such as the construction of roads, provision of power supply, water supply and other social amenities that could improve the economic situations of Nigeria's citizens.

Some economic reforms like privatization and banking reforms were introduced to reduce corruption Obayelu [20] yet their public bodies such as NDIC (Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation) and Central Bank of Nigeria still regulate the banks. Also, despite the efforts of the Nigeria government through the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Social Development and Disaster Management (FMHDS) came up with developmental programmes such as N-Power, and Farmer's Money to support the youth who were willing to go into Agriculture or acquire skills to be self-sufficient. The new EFCC Chairman, Mr Olukoyede, appointed by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu in 2023, alleged that 2.9 trillion naira meant for developmental projects between 2018 and 2020 were diverted into personal purses. These could have provided citizens with good roads, free education for many children up to tertiary level, about 200 tertiary institutions of international standard and a state-of-the-art hospital. This was discovered in one project out of numerous others that are yet to be checked. How can the lives of Nigeria's citizens improve considering the magnitude of corruption in the country? How could the Nigerian society develop economically?

Political Corruption

Political corruption happens when leaders do not implement policies or make it to favour themselves Maina, & Abdulrazak [4]. Political corruption prevents good governance, especially among political leaders in a democratic government Ogonnaya [16]. Osakede [7] stated that corruption is the bane of good governance. Since good governance leads to sustainable development, corruption in political governance hinders development. Ogonnaya [16] argue that political leaders in Nigeria are the causes of poor development.

Indeed, corruption provides ground for desperate politicians to seek, attain and retain power through personal funds or public funds. By this, the supremacy of law is undermined Oseghale [21]. Also, ill-gotten wealth has been used to propel insecurity in Nigeria. Boko Haram as a terrorist group has sponsors in the political sphere. If corruption could cause insecurity, it is a real threat to development. During President Obasanjo's administration, there were pieces of evidence that he could not achieve much with the established anti-graft agencies because the president and some of his friends and families had accumulated so much wealth by the end of his tenure Osakede [7]. It is disheartening that culpable politicians arrested by antigraft agencies during President Muhammed Buhari's administration were later freed due to political influence Nageri [18]. A former minister of petroleum resources, Mrs Daziani Madueke, under the

President, was accused of corruption by different panels and the news spread globally Osakede [7]. She left Nigeria before the end of the administration and has not returned to date. No doubt, most military and political leaders accumulate wealth at the expense of the public good. Also, James Ibori who was discharged of corruption cases in Nigeria was later charged and jailed in London due to corruption Ogonnaya [16]. These and other cases have shown that Nigeria is not serious or lacks the will and capacity to fight corruption among its political leaders Yagboyaju [2].

The high cost of governance in Nigeria is alarming as legislators earn more than their counterparts in developed countries (USA, UK) some citizens hardly afford a meal in a day. The gap between the rulers and the ruled is so wide and this is an indication of a political corruption. No wonder, there is corruption is a clog in the wheel of development because political governance influences economic governance Oseghale [21]. When there is corruption in governance, there is a lack of accountability and transparency which leads to economic poverty Mohammed [5]. Transparency International always rated Nigeria as one of the most corrupt countries Obayelu [20]. The practice of political corruption has always been in the history of Nigeria and not only under democratically elected leaders. The state of people's poverty during Late General Sanni Abacha was alarming. To date, some Western Countries are still returning Abacha loot, monies kept in foreign accounts to the Nigerian government. The irony is that the refunded monies are not expended judiciously by the governments that have received Abacha loot. No doubt, the act of stealing money and diverting funds for personal benefits are the reasons most infrastructures are collapsing, and social amenities are not available in health and education systems Osakede [7].

Electoral Corruption

On electoral corruption, it is noted that corruption does not only undermine democracy, but it undermines the legitimacy of government Adebajoko & Okorie [1]. Issues of legitimacy have pervaded both academic and legal discourses since President Ahmed Bola Tinubu emerged as the President of the Republic of Nigeria on 29 May 2023. It began with issues of 25% of votes in the Federal Capital Territory and the Independent Electoral Commission's (INEC) non-compliance with INEC Election Results Viewer (IREV) as promised before the election.

In Nigeria, money and elections are closely knitted in Nigeria's political sphere to the extent that electoral corruption could be regarded as an aspect of political corruption. Some of the politicians have become "moneybags" that use wealth to win elections and buy political positions Yagboyaju [2]. The ideas of "fatherism" and "money politics" in Nigeria's political system fuel corruption. Usually, the godfathers are wealthy and once they sponsor their preferred candidates to attain power, they control them behind the scenes. The political candidates that have earlier promised to develop their jurisdiction become handicapped as the godfathers need to recoup their money in multiple folds.

Some reforms have been introduced into the electoral system in Nigeria to curb acts of electoral corruption, but Omotola [11] observed that the failure of electoral reforms has led to a lack of public trust in the government. The recent reform on transfer and collation of election results failed woefully in Nigeria and the credibility of INEC was questioned. The types of corruption notwithstanding, Maina, & Abdulrazak [4] have identified the main causes of corruption in Nigeria. These include but are not limited to weak institutional systems, deficit transparency, unwholesome struggle over resources, erosion of moral values and weak democratic institutions. Addressing issues of corruption through a policy may not be effective if the factors that aid the act will be counterproductive. In 2022, all lecturers in the federal universities went on strike for nine months without payment. Low morale and morals could make some of the lecturers tempted to use their positions for personal gains from students. The bitter truth is that the future of citizens and unborn children have been sacrificed on the altar of corruption in Nigeria.

Anti-Corruption Law: A Policy Solution to Corruption in Nigeria

Introducing the death sentence and life sentence as punishments for corrupt people in Nigeria is the policy reform needed as anti-corruption law to stop corruption. Eradicating the problem of corruption in Nigeria is challenging Igbuzor [14]. Hence, this needs for an anti-corruption law. Even though anti-graft agencies are still making efforts to find a lasting solution towards reducing corruption; insufficient autonomy, less authority and limited resources are factors hindering their effectiveness Lawal [9]; Ogonnaya [13]. Aside from the observed factors, political interference has aborted some trials. It is acknowledged that their efforts were better than the previous policy of code of conduct and criminal code in checkmating corruption, but it is high time Nigeria makes a policy that will introduce severe punishment for offenders. More so, China has a history of anti-corruption law which could be studied, transferred, and contextualized in Nigeria.

Corruption is a global issue and there is a need for international cooperation to curb cooperation as continual localizing of corruption will not be helpful Lawal [9]. Also, there is the need to introduce a reform that will allow capital punishment for corrupt leaders as practices in some countries such as China. A strong judiciary is the hope of a less corrupt Nigerian society. Through this reform, there should be new laws with minimal and maximal punishments depending on the category of corruption. This aligns with the recommendation that corrupt citizens should be prosecuted to curb the practices Nageri [18]. Hence, change of orientation, improvement of democratic practices, good ethics and morals, and transparency and accountability will help the policy recommended in this paper to be effective, firm, and sustainable as additional measures in curbing corruption. Waking up to realize the dire consequences of corrupt practices would first arrest the hearts of most people while working on

supporting measures. United Nations (2016) [22] recommended that reduction of corruption should be prioritized but it is high time Nigeria declared a state of emergency on corruption. Unlike anti-graft agencies, anti-corruption law is better situated in the constitution with clearly stated penalties as government policy on corruption. Consequently, the interpretation of corruption and all acts related to it are clear to the citizens of Nigeria. A lot of awareness needs to be done through the Ministry of Information and National Orientation.

Anti-corruption policy should provide punishments for judiciary members who fail to interpret laws appropriately and executives for not enforcing laws as applicable. With this policy, reforms should be introduced into anti-graft agencies through international collaborations with International Police and Investigation Bodies (Federal Bureau of Investigation) etc. Delay in judgement and wrong judgement in corruption cases encourage corrupt practices (Maina, & Abdulrazak) and should incur punishment for guilty judiciary members in the anti-corruption policy. This would serve as a check for corrupt judges.

Superficial attention cannot solve deep-rooted problems like corruption requires a political reform that is systematic, consistent, and comprehensive Ogonnaya [13]. But it is crucial to address the reasons previous government policies failed as each new government keeps promising to tackle the hydra-headed challenge and citizens continue to watch worse occurrences of corruption. All hands must be on deck to accomplish the anti-corruption policy by carrying people with proper publication and focus. All bodies and agencies will embrace anti-corruption laws if they are involved in the conventional policy-making process. The fight against corruption must not be the government's responsibility alone through EFCC, ICPC, SON (Standard Organisation of Nigeria), NAFDAC (National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should be encouraged to fight corruption through their activities. For example, the act of collaborating with the government under NGOs will encourage whistleblowers to function with a sense of purpose. Also, foundational issues that promote corrupt acts need to be addressed. Okereka [12] identified shunning corrupt leaders, seeing politics as a developmental endeavour, teaching good morals at all levels of education, and reducing inequality as the main solutions to corruption in Nigeria. This is the reason this paper advocates for an anti-corruption policy without neglecting key issues because laws should be made to guide citizens and stop them from destroying others [23].

Conclusion

This article has highlighted the various challenges of development due to corruption in Nigeria and the efforts of different governments with little or no results. This leads to a call for policy reforms based on severe punishments to be meted out to corrupt individuals and leaders through an anti-corruption policy. This policy is to clearly define corrupt acts in

a systematic, comprehensive, and all-inclusive way by including it in the education curriculum of students right from primary school. Anti-corruption policy as an aspect of Civic education will orient Nigerian citizens right from childhood to understand the ills and damages of corruption in the all-round development of the nation and to realise one of the best ways of becoming a patriotic citizen is by shunning all forms of corruption. The anti-corruption law would also help people to understand the inherent dangers of corrupt practices. However, the implementation of severe penalties and punishment of life imprisonment, forfeiture of all properties and death would do more in changing Nigerians' mindsets from seeing corruption as smartness or a norm but an evil that must be eradicated because, in the end, everyone suffers from underdevelopment in one way or the other. Hence, development is the nation's life Okereka [12].

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