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CORRUPTION VIS-À-VIS NATION BUILDING: NIGERIA AT THE CROSS-ROAD

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Abstract

The aim of this research is an investigation into the impact of corruption to nation building in Nigeria and the prospects for better democratic nation. This paper makes use of the method of analysis to examine the pervasive problem of corruption in Nigerian within the context of its evolving democratic process. While the nation operates on democratic governance amid electoral disputes, this moment presents a critical opportunity to realign with the true ideals of democracy and national development. While making reference to Nigeria's historical and global reputation for corruption, the study highlights how entrenched corrupt practices and weak institutional frameworks have significantly hindered economic growth, deepened poverty, and alienated citizens from governance. By analyzing the contagious and systemic nature of corruption in the Nigerian polity, the paper demonstrates its central role in sustaining underdevelopment. This paper argues that meaningful progress and the realization of developmental goals depend on a decisive break from corrupt practices. Hence, the study concludes by proposing practical solutions aimed at curbing corruption and fostering a more accountable, transparent, and prosperous society.

Keywords: Nigeria, corruption, nation building, poverty,

Introduction

Given the on-going electoral process, Nigeria will soon be inaugurating another chance for democratic governance, regardless of the numerous litigations that would ensue indicating how far behind the country still stands before its goal of arriving at a perfect democracy. Nevertheless, it is a golden opportunity we must not waste to insert the nation into a true democratic mainstream with its promises and prospects for better life. The theme of this year's annual memorial lecture x-raying the evil of corruption and Nigeria's incapacity to meet her millennium development goals in the

face of her deep-rooted incorporation into this ill, seems the most providential thing that could help us look into ourselves and seek out necessary ways to eliminate corruption in the new political dispensation and thus lift our people from the crippling crucibles of poverty. This is because corruption is the most stumbling block to the economic development of any nation, and Nigeria's own is "legendary" (Afrigov, 1995). To be classified in 2001 by the Transparency International as world's second worst corrupt nation shows how great our woes are. However, this awareness says Aluko (2010), has helped to push into increasing recognition how this evil and other aspects of poor governance or weak institutions have made a substantial damage to Nigeria's economic growth, This damage has been scored again when Hillary Clinton (2010) blamed Nigeria's woes on her corrupt leaders saying: 'The failure of the Nigerian leadership over many years to respond to the legitimate needs of their own young people, to have a government that promotes a meritocracy, that really understood that democracy can't just be giving lip service, but delivering services to the people, has meant there is a lot of alienation in this country.

It is the aim of this paper then to analyze Nigeria's attitude to corruption and show how this ill has permeated and crippled the nerves of our polity due to its contagiousness and malignancy. It aims at demonstrating how Nigeria, trapped in the cycle of corruption, has remained poor and under developed, and why if she chooses the path of development, she must give up the way of corruption. The paper will finally offer possible panacea that could help to join up the broken pieces of this nation into a healthy entity.

Definition of Corruption

Corruption, generally agreed, is a subject that has received extensive attention in the academic circle, but it has equally been elusive in all the attempts to grapple with the concept at the theoretical, intellectual and practical levels, a clumsiness that has aided the difficulty of even deciding who and how to deal squarely with the perpetrators. The Encyclopedia Americana sees corruption as disguised payment in the form of gifts, legal fees, employment, favors to relatives, social influence, or any relationship that sacrifices the public interest and welfare, with or without the implied payment of money. Lipset & Lenz (2000) viewed it as efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means, private gain at public expense; or a misuse of public power for private benefit (pp.112114). Osoba (1996) adds that it is an anti-social behavior conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms, and which undermine the authorities to improve the living conditions of the people.

Thus, in whatever form one sees corruption, it is a negation of ethical behaviour or societal ethics which, Ogbuehi (1998) defined as "the code of moral principles that sets standards of good and bad, or right and wrong in one's conduct and thereby guides the behaviour". Therefore, it is inimical to the development of any society because it usually perforates the building of a socio-politically feasible and, economically solvent nation through the selfish orientations and nonchalance (of those involved) to the nation's survival.

In Nigeria, these corrupt practices include among others: ascendancy to political leadership through election rigging, nepotism, son of the soil philosophy, politics of expediency, doctrine of ten-percent; giving and receiving of kick-backs for government contracts; police extortion as

precondition for performing their duties; falsification of accounts; false declaration of age, falsification and forgery of certificates, perjurious inclination, violation of oaths of office, payment of money for governments' job not done, manipulation of foreign exchange, import licence frauds, pen robbery or looting of the public treasury, creation of "ghost-workers", awarding of complex and bogus contracts as means to defraud and so on.

The Growth of Corruption in Nigeria

Some writers like Lipset and Lenz (2000) say that corruption is endemic in all governments, and that it is not peculiar to any continent, region and ethnic group. It cuts across faiths, religious denominations and political systems and affects both young and old, man and woman alike. Corruption is found in democratic and dictatorial politics; feudal, capitalist and socialist economies.

Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist cultures are equally bedeviled by corruption. The history of the world, they said, is full of widespread illegality and corruption. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the magnitude of corruption is the same in every society. Some countries are more corrupt than others! As George Orwell notes in his widely read book, *Animal Farm*: 'All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others'. It is precisely on this point that our concern about Nigeria calls for a serious attention. For having once been scored the world's worst corrupt nation but one, it is unimaginable what the scale of corruption in Nigeria is especially in our undeveloped economy, where its impact is obviously more profound than in wealthy and developed societies.

Given the poverty of this country, Nigeria cannot afford to be corrupt. But this is not the case. In my article, *Nigeria's Democratic Polity: A 'Covenant*

without a Sword', I pointed out that at 50 years of age, Nigeria was ripe enough to have shaped her destiny. Whatever way one may like to assess it and whatever categories one may employ, half a century is quite a reasonable length of time at which any human destiny which is open to boundless promise and opportunities shall have been accomplished. But Nigeria has failed to grapple with her problem; she has continued to descend the cliff of decay. And that crumble and despondency over recovery have inspired the work *This House Has Fallen: Midnight in Nigeria* by Karl Maier --a bracing, disturbing, heartbreaking story of Nigeria from its creation in 1960 through forty years of failure and disappointment to a time of apparent renewal. Here, Maier roundly pointed out that one outstanding factor in the failure of all the attempts to lift up this fallen nation again has been 'corruption'. In the mid-1960s, the events leading to the first Nigerian *coup d'etat*, said Obasanjo (1987), showed clearly that the war was avoidable were not for the lack of patriotism, selfishness, greed, corruption, sectionalism and tribalism extolled by the people in government. In fact, the corruption of the politicians was one of the main reasons given by the military for their intervention, but experience showed that the military was even more corrupt than the civilian politicians. The military ruled Nigeria from 1966-1979 and handed over to Alhaji Shehu Shagari's administration in 1979. Corruption went on as usual, unabated before the administration was overthrown again by Buhari/Idiagbon regime. This latter regime launched a war against corruption, tried and jailed many politicians and dismissed many civil servants. But when General Ibrahim Babangida's regime overthrew the Buhari's military government, it released most of these politicians jailed by the Buhari regime and reduced the sentences of few others in jail. Indeed,

scholars have been unanimous in the idea that corruption reached an unprecedented level in incidence and magnitude during General Ibrahim Babangida's regime. According to Gboyega (1996), it was as if the Government existed so that corruption might thrive. In 1991 for example, the reporter of financial times, London was expelled from Nigeria for revealing that \$12 billion received by the country from the Gulf oil windfall was misappropriated by President Ibrahim Babangida. Barely three years later, Pius Okigbo's, report officially confirmed the story. At that time, of course, \$12 billion would have been sufficient for the nation's budget for eight years (Osinbajo 1997).

Writing on the steady looting prevalent in Nigeria during Babangida's regime, Mbachu (1993) cites how 'in 1990, accounts for the proceeds from petroleum exports showed that 1.5 billion dollars had disappeared. In the same year about \$5 billion in oil revenue recorded by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) missed out from record in the Federation Account as required by the revenue distribution mechanism... and by 1991, one billion dollars had been spent for undocumented purposes' out of the two billion dollars Nigeria realized from the sale of its equity in joint venture with shell.

The case of General Sani Abacha was equally alarming, for he was estimated, Bagudu (2004) said; to have looted the country to the tune of \$4.3 billion. Indeed, Nigeria's corruption has had a long history that it appears to have become a culture. Ribadu (2009), the former chairman of EFCC (Economic and Financial Crime Commission), makes us understand that between 1960 and 1999 Nigerian officials had stolen or wasted more than \$440bn which is six times the total sum America in its Marshall Plan mapped out to rebuild a devastated Europe in the aftermath of the World

War II. This means that from day one of her independence Nigeria has been deep in corruption. Corruption they say corrupts and the deeper one gets into the mire, the more desperate one becomes in defending the well from where he draws his booty.

Since the last decade when Nigeria returned to democracy, the situation has not been better either. Indeed, corruption has now assumed new dimensions in which the legislative and executive arms of government conspire to loot the treasury. Recently, the governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi (2010) stirred the hornet's nest when he alerted the nation that if our country continued moving the way it did where the national assembly gulped 25% of the nation's funds, the infrastructural needs of this country were better forgotten. How could the economy develop when senators decide to pay themselves a monthly salary of N27 million each and reps members a sum of N15 million each? Not even in the US which is the world's largest economy are the senators paid 10% of that sum. The CNN News June 14, 2001, tells us that the main asset of the onetime Senate Majority Leader, Tom Daschle (the nation's highest-ranking Democrat, with direct influence over billions of federal dollars), was a one-half share in a house in Aberdeen, South Dakota, given by his mother and worth between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in income.

The jumbo pay of these legislators apart, there exists numerous other ways they have continued to suck Nigeria dry. Few years back, the Speaker of the House of Representative, Udoette was removed on the discovery that she had appropriated for their members a sum of N600 million furniture allowances. In the light of all these, Sanusi (2010) insisted that there is no way we can grow our economy if this type of scenario continues. He lamented that other countries that are coming out of war and other forms

of crises are getting their economies right, when ironically Nigeria which helped them exit from their woes is still groping: "A country like Ethiopia, Which came out of war not long ago is growing at 11 per cent yearly and by 2012, Ethiopia will be generating 4,000 megawatts of electricity which is more than what Nigeria is generating today" (p. 2). Today, Sanusi's courageous crusade has been swept under the carpet and it is business as usual.

An historical look at Nigeria shows that no outcry against corruption ends corruption; not even when they are voiced out by the leaders. According to Rina Okonkwo, (2007), "all the inspiring words of our leaders and journalists have not changed anyone. We have heard the most eloquent appeals and strongest language castigating wrongdoers to no avail". It shows that there is disconnect between utterances and conducts, even in the leaders themselves. For instance, the former Inspector General of the Nigeria Police Force Mr. Tafa Balogun, had once posed as an anticorruption crusader and declared that "the evil that corruption has brought to the Nigerian society is very much. Corruption has become a culture in our society today. That is why we have to fight against it so that we would be able to improve our image. We intend to commence an in-house cleaning in the Nigeria Police Force" (see, Transparency International, Annual Report, 1998). But hardly did two years pass was Mr. Tafa Balogun accused of corruptly enriching himself to the tune of several billions of Naira from the N18 billion police fund. He was later removed from office and arraigned before the court for prosecution.

At his Inaugural Speech on May 29, 1999, Olusegun Obasanjo declared to tackle the menace of corruption in Nigeria. He said: "Corruption will be tackled head-on. No society can achieve its full potential if it allows

corruption to become the full-blown cancer it has in Nigeria." And he vowed that there will be no sacred cows in his process to stamp out corruption in the society. Nevertheless, the corrupt big cows continued to walk freely the streets of Nigeria; they even multiplied in number. The NEWS, in its July 11, 1999 issue *The Face of a Liar*, unveiled for instance, the forgery and perjury committed by the former Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alhaji Ibrahim Salisu Buhari who, working for the NEPA had corruptly amassed great wealth and bribed his way to the fourth highest position in the land. The information about the scandal dominated the political agenda of Nigeria for some time. Ironically, President Olusegun Obasanjo who had in his inaugural speech vowed to entertain no sacred cow in his campaign to transform Nigeria into a corruption-free society disappointed the world by granting Alhaji Salisu Buhari a state pardon.

In fact, the intensity of Kleptocratic tendency in Nigeria has continued to increase in vitality to the extent that at a particular time, says Ofeimum (1993), 'the size of the money kept by individual Nigerians in foreign bank accounts as once estimated was at parity with the national debt and some billions above 33 billion dollars owed by the country to International Finance Institutions.'

Devastating Impact of Corruption on Nation Building

The damages corruption could do to any economy or polity are astronomical. It can slow the economy to its barest minimum as seen in slow movement of files in offices, police extortions and slow traffics on the highways, port congestions, queues at passport offices and gas stations and host of others. In addition, it limits access to basic social services as well as increases the cost of their delivery. It is one of the factors for poverty,

and undermines the legitimacy of the state. It is antipoor, anti development, anti growth and anti-investment.

Unless corruption is addressed, no underdeveloped nation can get far. As one time president of the World Bank, Wolfenshon (1999) revealed that "investors ... (prefer) to move their money to where the risks of corruption are less pronounced" According to him, corruption blocks with ensuing server consequences all forms of aid assistance, since any 'perception in donor countries that corruption in the recipient countries sends their aid assistance down a black-hole is..the greatest threats to future aid' (pp. 15-16). Imagine, for instance, the effect of it on Mozambique where once, the "civil servants ...were paid a total of \$160 million bribes, a sum amounting to 90% of government's budget. Yet 9% of the country's GNP comes from foreign aid" (Afrigov 1995). We can only imagine the misfortune on the people if this aid is withdrawn following the perceived corruption. Indeed, not even the multilateral financial agencies find it easy to grant loans and technical assistance when they know that a large portion of their money will be used to line up the stomachs of politicians. When they do give, they must bring in additional personnel; incur additional costs just to watch us see how their money is spent. Whenever the receipts of expenditures are submitted, they spend thrice the time just verifying whether they are genuine or not. Corruption does a lot of damage to the economy; it leads to wastage of resources, to unjustified high costs of production and very often to low and poor quality of products produced. The quality of goods and services available to the public is reduced because some companies try to cut corners to increase profit margins. The implication of this is the reduction in the competitive edge of our country's international business community. The director general of the Anti-corruption agency Malaysia,

Tan Sri Zulkifli Mahmood (....) writing on the required ethics for nation building decried the menace of corruption. In its various forms, he said, 'corruption is a universal phenomenon which no society can afford to ignore. It could infect and paralyze any procedure, rule, regulation, and law of any system, organization, or institution, be it governmental or otherwise. It is a social and cancerous evil. Even though no society is immune to it, it should not be allowed to take root'. Corruption undercuts fair play, it tramples on laws, rules and regulations; it corrodes our moral values and our moral base.

The capital outflow caused by corruption is another monster on economy and national development. Moneys accumulated through corruption, if they are considerably large, often wind up in foreign banks. This constitutes a net loss to the country. We have already signalled the case of late General Sani Abacha who looted approximately \$4.3 billion distributed in foreign Banks.

The celebrated cases of the former governors James Ibori of Delta state, Alamesiya of Bayelsa and others who enriched foreign banks with their loot of state revenue funds are of public knowledge. In June, 1989, for instance, Alhaji Mohammed Bashir equally alleged that he paid \$500,000 into the account of Chief of general Staff, Vice-Admiral Augustus Aikhomu, at Standard Chartered Bank, Zurich. The aim was to facilitate his company's equity shares in Pan Ocean Oil Limited. He went public to make the allegations when his bid failed. These are funds which when invested in the country could have boosted the economy and improved the lives of the citizens.

There are other myriad effects of corruption on a nation's sociopolitical and economic development. Sen (1997) names some of them as 'braindrain'

phenomenon where talented professionals leave the country in search of employment in other lands; discourages honest effort and valuable economic activities; breeds inefficiency and nepotism. According to Lipset & Lenz,

(2000) it leads to shifting government expenditures to areas in which the corrupt politicians can collect bribes easily; leads to investing on large and hard-to-manage projects to make fraud easy. Actually, corruption has done an incalculable damage to Nigeria's socio-political development; it has led to social revolution and military takeovers, thus destabilizing the nation. Most "post-coup rationalizations" in less developed worlds point to corruption. Corruption in Nigeria has had a long pedigree, and as a process, has totally threatened the existence of government.

The Way Forward

From the foregoing, it is accepted that unless we principally tackle corruption and confront its devil locked in the engine of development our nation would remain impoverished forever. Many suggestions have been given on how to eliminate it, including the idea of responsible leadership. The blame has been much on the government which is needed to defeat corruption as itself the core problem in Nigeria. According to CASS (1993), 'itis in government that corruption thrives most, wasting resources we need, defeating all prospects of democracy and development, all sense of patriotism and turning all of us into hardened cynics with no concern for public good, no faiths in public morality or even in its possibility". The same view was expressed in the Transparency International's Annual Report, (1998), that in many African countries, those who should be playing the role of soldiers for the war (the politicians, judiciary, legal enforcement institutions, police and other such official legal bodies) are the

biggest part of the problem of corruption rather than the solution. It is not as if the government has not shown itself a committed crusader against this common enemy at least by the various policy experiments like the judicial commissions of enquiry, the Code of Conduct Bureau; the Mass Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC), the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC). But, these have not succeeded because they have always operated at the level of mere symbolism, due in fact, that the crusaders themselves could not changed their habit.

Consequently, it is being demanded that winning the war against corruption requires a struggle for societal transformation, generated from the grass-root and but across all levels of life. It means educating our citizenry into proper values and systems. The British realized, as early as 1947, that an educated, enlightened citizenry was the key to stopping corruption. Nigeria cannot effectively control the menace of corruption in the nation by merely instituting probe panels or establishing agencies for crime. It is suggested that to tame the surge of corruption in Nigeria, the general population should be re-orientated to a better value system, should be offered different dispositions than that of survival of the fittest and grab-whatever-comes-your-way mentality (Dike, 1999) or seeing the "state as a primary source of private wealth" (Iseike-Jonah, 1995) which politics is what has come to be in Nigeria -the shortest path to affluence and stardom.

The practice of virtue is the decisive solution to behavioral change and reduction in corruption. It is what guarantees the nation that those whom she entrusts to execute war on corruption are those who recognize and always do what is right - men and women of virtue. Virtue says MacIntyre

(1981) is an acquired human quality, the possession and exercise of which enables us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices, and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any of such goods. Virtuous leaders [in government and business] are persons of honesty, integrity and trust. When the right thing is always done, then the nation's productivity could increase, which would mean enough goods and services, prosperity and economic growth, and which would in turn allow the citizens the freedom to live a meaningful life.

It is equally suggested that there be some kind of followership resistance to corruption by way of social revolution or saying no to corrupt leaders. The current successful revolutions in North Africa like in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya etc. are cited as cases which stand out clear in the determination to resist and fight corruption and corrupt leaders. According to Osundare, (1999, 39), "if we do not force those who rule us to tread the path of accountability and respect for the rule of law, we would continue our present misery and sign a pact with eternal underdevelopment. Our fate is too precious to abandon to the whims of the (corrupt) politicians. Our rulers wasted the 20th century for Nigeria. We must not stagger into the next millennium with the same sissyphean burden." Pat Utomi (2009), using the same language as he spoke on how to deal with the corrupt people said that corruption persists because "we have a high tolerance for crime and we need to lose this tolerance." His belief is that condition typically drives people's behavior and if we want to progress as a viable vibrant and prosperous nation, we need to engender those conditions that are conducive to these goals. For him, man is typically the same, there is propensity for good and evil in him and unless the machineries are put in place to repress

the evil tendency, Nigeria or the world at large must be open to enduring evil.

Other scholars have insisted on all possible measures as long as they help in curbing corruption. It is like Feuerabend's methodological anarchism or the pragmatists' acceptance of any method as long as something useful to life draws from it. They maintained that human ailments could require many doses of medicines to be treated. Similarly, the menace of corruption, which has gone deep into the fabric of Nigeria, requires all the necessary medicines to effectively control it. No single and simple remedies are sufficient and the problem cannot be solved overnight since corruption has been ingrained into the entire structure of the society. Nigeria has in theory the solutions on how to tackle corruption; but like other issues bedeviling the nation, implementations of the laws are the Achilles heel of the society. Thus, among those measures must include empowering the law enforcement agencies such as the police. The Nigerian police should be upgraded in status, and be given good training, well equipped and well paid. The police force should become an elite profession, which would be open only to those with good moral character. The contention is that if the police and other security agents like the customs, soldiers and other paramilitary groups learn and understand their limits and follow the rules, things might improve in Nigeria.

In my earlier article already pointed out in this paper, *Nigeria's Democratic Polity: A 'Covenant without a Sword'*, I have maintained that making our laws capable of biting is very : indispensable to maintaining decency and curbing corruption. Against those who think that Nigeria needs to make laws that would guard against corruptions, I insisted that we already have them in abundance, but they are not working. They are not working because

laws, according to Hobbes, appear ineffective without external power to coerce. The laws must be backed up with some terror. This is so because, 'of themselves and without terror of some power to cause them to be observed, laws are contrary to our natural passions... Covenants without the sword are but words, and of no strength to secure a man at all' (Hobbes 1946: II: 17). If defaulters are not punished for their crimes, in vain do we hope for a cure against corruption, since there is no deterrence. The satisfaction which one derives achieving his passion through transgression must be countered with a contrary pain that renders his exploits worthless or the thought of possible crimes useless. "Punishments" says Aristotle (1999), "are a kind of cure, and it is the nature of cures to be effected by contraries".

There have not been sufficient attempts in Nigeria to make the weight of the law descend upon the transgressors. Nigerians are not more apt or more genetically susceptible to crime and corruption than any other race or nationality. The major reason for instance, why Europeans do not commit as much crimes as Nigerians is not because they have a better nature but because there is deterrence. In the words of Ribadu, (2009,12), "corruption is not a native of any land; it just finds easier homes in some. Societies that have been able to move ahead are those that put the statutes in place to criminalize corruption and ensure that the enforcement mechanisms are proper and ready for action".

Secondly, the punishment must be measurably big enough to deter an intending offender from the crime. This is why the 2 years jail term handed on to Bode George and 5 others by the court for misappropriating N85billion appeared most unfortunate, and only facilitates further crimes. Few weeks ago, he finished his jail term and gave a lavish party in which

notable government officials were invited. We know with Hobbes (1946: II, 27) that 'punishment, if not great enough to deter men from the action, is an invitation to it: because when men compare the benefit of their injustice with the harm of their punishment, by necessity they would choose that which appears best for themselves.'

Conclusion

From the foregoing, everyone admits that corruption is a major challenge to nation building and development in Nigeria. It is a hydra-headed monster which erodes the capacity of the state to deliver services effectively, provide security and maintain peace and stability. No country which is corroded by corruption sees the light of development; it generates poverty and turns resource-rich nations into low income, backward societies. Nigeria is therefore left to either remain corrupt or eschew corruption if she wishes to achieve its Millennium Development Goals. Corruption undermines the ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goals since it diverts the resources meant for education, health, rural roads and electricity for personal use. It increases the cost of business transactions in any region and has always been a major disincentive for much-craved foreign investments.

We have suggested that this evil be attacked from all fronts possible, but over and above all, that there be grass root education of the citizenry into virtue. Without ethics, any money budgeted toward fighting corruption in Nigeria or towards national development projects is a thing cast to the wild cat. Aristotle insists that the aim of ethical philosophy is practical to make us better men. Secondly, the laws against crimes must be implemented to the letters, that is, punishment must be meted out on any criminal without exception, including the mighty ones. The Vanguard, 30th March 2002 tells

us that big men are the greatest criminals and unless these criminals are equally touched and brought to book, the rate of crime may not reduce. [But] If you bring three or four of these big men to book, the rate of criminal activities would reduce. Arrest ministers, the paper declared, arrest [the] big people and others would fear.

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