

Corruption in Nigeria: An Impediment to National Development in the Fourth Republic

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ABSTRACT

Corruption has become a pervasive social phenomenon in Nigeria. It has become institutionalized in the country's political life. Previous civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari and the military regimes of General Ibrahim Babangida and General Sanni Abacha were beset with unprecedented corrupt practices. With the return of democratic rule in May 1999, there were high expectations that the new democratic dispensation would address the menace of corruption that bedeviles the polity. It is very unfortunate that since the return of civil rule, the incidence of corruption has reached dangerous proportion. This study therefore aims at x-raying these corrupt practices that infest the country and determines its impact on national development. The study is based on content analysis that relies on the use of secondary data as its source of information. The findings reveal that infrastructural decay, poverty and poor management of public enterprises, human capital flight among others are the impact of corruption on the present democratic dispensation. It therefore, recommends among others that civil society organizations should organize workshops for Nigeria's political leaders to facilitate complete change of attitude towards corruption. The culture of credible and accountable governance must be instilled in the political leaders at all levels.

Keywords: *Corruption, national development, democratic dispensation, impediment*

INTRODUCTION

Corruption has been identified as one of the greatest obstacles to national development. The efforts of the successive governments in Nigeria (both civilian and military) since independence to accelerate economic and social transformation of the country have been frustrated by the menace of corruption in the polity. It is an incontrovertible fact that corruption has become institutionalized and pervades every facet of the country's political and economic life. Nigeria is endowed with huge natural and human resources, but it is saddening that the country is beset with various challenges in different sectors of national development such as low standard of education, poor health service delivery system, acute poverty, infrastructural decay etc. The presence of these problems is attributed to excessive corruption in the country. With the return of civil rule in 1999, hopes were high that the new democratic dispensation would address the menace of corruption in the polity. The high expectation was based on the measures taken by the new civilian government to eradicate corruption in the country. Some of these measures

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are: establishment of anti-graft agencies such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), Public Service Reform (monetization to reduce waste and reduction of over-bloated personnel). It is regrettable that despite the achievements recorded by these measures, the incidence of corruption in the country is still “pervasive, alarming and endemic”. Therefore, the basic focus of this study is to examine the manifestation of corrupt practices in Nigeria’s fourth republic and to determine its impact on national development.

Defining corruption is a daunting and challenging exercise. Marriam–Webster (1990) defines corruption as inducement offered to someone by improper or unlawful means such as bribery. Hornby (2001) sees corruption as dishonest or illegal behaviour especially of people in authority. He also perceives corruption as the act of making somebody change from moral to immoral standards of behaviour. Farida (2010) defines it as a pervasion or change from the general acceptable rules or laws for selfish gain. Transparency International (2008) observes that corruption is the misuse of entrusted power for private benefit. Corruption involves behaviour on the part of officials in public sector in which they improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves or those close to them by misuse of power entrusted to them. Similarly, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) cited in Mikail (2012) opines that corruption is misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit through bribery, exhortation, influence peddling, nepotism by government and public servants; it also prevails in private sector. The World Bank (2006) defines corruption as “the abuse of office for private gains. Public office is abused for private gain when an official accepts, solicits or exhorts a bribe. It is also abused when private agents actively offer bribes to circumvent public offices and processes for competitive advantages or profit”. In the same vein, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) defines corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain. It encompasses unilateral abuses by government officials such as embezzlement and nepotism, as well as abuses linking public and private sectors such as bribery, exhortion, influence peddling and fraud. Corruption arises both in political and bureaucratic offices. It can be petty and grand, organized or unorganized (USAID, 1999).

Development to majority of people in different countries has varied meaning (Akanji and Akosile, 2001). In many nations it means the attainment of self governance, to others it signifies the provision of essential infrastructure that create a healthy atmosphere, proper provision of education, communication and ability to evolve an amiable business environment for its citizenry while some even see it as achievement in technology advancement. It is about raising the standard of living of the people, improving their education and health and also opening out to them new and equal opportunities for richer and more varied life. Naomi (1995) believes that development is usually taken to involve not only economic growth but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of healthcare, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life. Chisman (1984) cited in Lawal

and Abe (2011) views development “as a process of societal advancement, where improvement in the well being of the people are generated through strong partnerships between all sectors, corporate bodies and other groups in the society. It is reasonable to know that development is not only economic exercise, but also involves both socio-economic and political issues and pervades all aspects of societal life”. Evolving from the meaning of development, national development can be explained to mean totality of improvement in collective and concrete terms across socio-economic, political, technological as well as religious and is best achieved through strategies mapped out by government as contained in the nation development plans (Akindele, Ogini and Agada, 2013). According to Oluwatoyin and Lawal (2001), national development can be described as “the overall development of a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or a nation. This is best achieved through development planning, which can be described as the country’s collection of strategies mapped out by government”.

Dimension of Corrupt Practices in Nigeria

Corruption has become a pervasive social phenomenon in Nigeria. In the contemporary Nigeria, it has virtually become a way of life. Previous regimes in Nigeria were involved in massive corruption. Between 1979 and 1983, widespread looting and plundering of the national treasury continued unabated under the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) Government until it was toppled by the military government of Buhari/Idiagbon (Ologbenla, 2007). The Babangida regime which dethroned Buhari/Idiagbon regime was vigorously criticized for the unprecedented corruption menace in Nigeria. Most prominently, the Pius Okigbo Report indicted Babangida for his inability to account for the \$12.4 billion that had accrued to Nigeria from the Gulf War oil sales (Ologbenla 2007). The Abacha government completely drained the economy as over N400 billion was “looted by Abacha and his military goons”.

With the entrenchment of democratic rule in 1999, it was expected that Obasanjo led administration would address the menace of corruption in the polity. This expectation was based on the determination of Obasanjo to eliminate corruption in Nigeria. In his first budget speech to National Assembly in 1999, President Obasanjo revealed that in the period proceeding the transition, about \$820 billion had been stolen and taken out of Nigeria and only \$1.2 billion of this amount had been recovered at that time (Ibrahim, 2003). On assuming office he signed anti-corruption bill into law and established Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). Despite these measures, corruption continues unabated in Nigeria’s political landscape. It continues to permeate and pervade every facet of national life.

During the first four years of Obasanjo’s administration, federal ministers allegedly stole more than N23 billion from the public coffers. An audit report released by Vincent Azie, acting Auditor-General of the Federation, shows that the amount represented financial frauds ranging from embezzlement, payments for jobs not done,

over-invoicing, double debiting, inflation of contract figures to release of money without the consent of approving authority in ten major ministries. Rather than cautioning the ministers whose ministries were named in the fraud or invite the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) to further investigate the veracity of the alleged fraud, Vincent Azie was hastily retired by the Presidency for Procedural Offences (Adekeye, 2003). Mrs. Diezani Alison-Madueke, powerful former Minister of Petroleum Resources under Jonathan's Administration had admitted before the Senate Committee on Finance that she spent a whopping N3.5 billion on kerosene subsidy without appropriation, in flagrant violation of the provisions of the 1999 constitution. In 2014, the House of Representatives also ordered an investigation of an alleged squandering of billions of Naira from the government funds by the former Petroleum Minister on maintenance of a private jet (Ikenna, 2015).

The former minister was later arrested in London, United Kingdom, by the newly formed International Corruption Unit of the Country's National Crimes Agency. The Senate Committee pronounced Vice President Atiku Abubakar guilty on the allegation that he diverted US \$145 million Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF). They reported that the Vice President abused his office by aiding or abetting the diversion of public funds in the sum of \$125 million and \$20 million respectively approved for the specific projects of deposits in banks, some of which were fraudulently converted as loans to NDTV, Mofas Shipping Company Limited and Transveri Service Limited (Ogundiya, 2009). Another serious case of corruption in the Fourth Republic is the allegation of abuse of office by the former Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balagun. Over N17.7 billion was recovered from the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Tafa Balogun by the EFCC. Balogun was found to have colluded with several governors and high government functionaries to cover up tract of serious crimes. For instance, Balagun was alleged to have collected N250 million from the former governor of Anambra State, Dr. Mbadinugu to cover up the murder of the former Chairman of Nigerian Bar Association, Anambra State, Mr. Igwe and his wife in September 2002 (Ologbenla, 2007).

The National Assembly has been noted for its corrupt tendencies. The former speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr. Salisu Buhari, opens up various cases of corruption in the National Assembly. Buhari spent fifty days in office before he was disgraced out of office for certificate forgery (Ologbenla, 2007). Chief Evans Enwerem, Chuba Okadigbo and Adolphus Nwabara were all impeached on the grounds of corruption (Ogundiya 2012). Senator Chuba Okadigbo among other things was found involved in the inflation of street light project to the tune 173 million Naira; Okadigbo also authorized the payment of 372 million Naira to furnish his residence with a sum estimated above N25 million Naira and equally installed and commissioned a 100 KVA generating set in the Senate President's residence at an inflated amount of 15 million Naira (Ogundiya, 2012). Similarly, Senate President Adolphus Wabara was also guilty of receiving bribe of N55 million Naira from Professor Osuji (former Minister of Education) to inflate the budgetary allocation to Education Ministry. Senator

Chimaroke Nnamani also faced 124 count charges of fraud conspiracy concealment and money laundering amounting to about 5.4 billion Naira (Mohammed, 2013). The incidence of corruption is pervasive at the state level. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) has mentioned 24 governors for enriching themselves with public funds through corruption. The most contentious of these were the cases of Plateau and Bayelsa State governors. Governor Jushua Dariye between 2001 and 2005 had looted the states' treasury to the tune of billions of Naira. Some of the Dariye's loot include N273 million, N240 million, 6 million, N1.16 billion (from the Ecological Fund allocated to Plateau State). N176 million, N1.18 billion, N10 million, N25 million, N103 million, N4.48 billion (all representing suspicious withdrawals from the Plateau State Government Accounts with banks etc. (Vanguard cited in Ologbenla, 2007). The arrest of Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, the Bayelsa State governor in London climaxed the classical cases of treasury looting by Nigerian political leaders. Alamieyeseigha starched away ₦420,000 found in different accounts belonging to him as well as assets worth ₦10 million. Alamieyeseigha, also diverted public funds to facilitate his acquisition of N1 billion shares in Bond Bank Plc. and the purchase of Chelsea Hotel Abuja for N2 billion (Ologbenla, 2007).

Impact of Corruption on National Development of Nigeria

Corruption has been recognized as the bane of national development in Nigeria. The most basic elements of national development include access to good health, education, shelter, productive and rewarding employment, good tarred roads, uninterrupted power supply, social and political stability (Ayinla, Yinusa and Adeoye, 2008). There is no denying fact that the incidence of corruption in the economy has undermined the performance of all sectors of national development. It has been a stumbling block to economic and social transformation of the country. Corruption contributes to infrastructural decay. This is manifested in the following maladies that bedevil the country. They include: poor health care delivery system, low standard of education, underdeveloped transport system, poor water supply and epileptic power supply. Money meant for these vital sectors of the economy are siphoned by corrupt public officials, thus militating against national development programmes. An eloquent example was squandering of \$16 billion invested in National Integrated Power Project just between 2006 and 2007 respectively and the misappropriation of N16 billion for Rural Electrification Project in 2009 (Mikail, 2012).

Another serious consequence of corruption in national development of Nigeria is mass poverty. Despite our huge potentials in human and material resources, Nigeria remains one of the poorest countries in the globe. This is occasioned by the misappropriation and mismanagement of public funds by Nigerian leaders. At present, majority of Nigerians are finding it very difficult to make a living and unemployment among the youths is increasing. In 2010, Nigeria's GDP per capita PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) of \$2,365 ranked as 138th in the world out of 180 countries, while 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 (World Bank, 2011). The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) which is released on yearly basis by the Transparency International has shown that Nigeria is one most corrupt countries in the world. The prevalence of corrupt practices in the country also accelerate brain-drain or human capital flight. Today, many Nigerian professionals including medical doctors, engineers, academics etc. are working in different parts of the world where there is better condition of service. The absence of these professionals has created a serious setbacks to our administrative system since their expertise knowledge could have been better utilized in Nigeria. Poor management of public enterprises is another implication of corruption in Nigeria's economy. Corruption breeds inefficiency and poor service delivery which retard the performance of these enterprises. Since the return of civil rule in 1999, the Nigerian Railway Corporation and states water boards are grossly mismanaged due to prevalence of corrupt practices on the part of the officials who are entrusted to manage these enterprises. Another serious consequence of corruption is that it militates against investment and economic growth. Therefore, if corruption discourages investments, limits economic growth and alters the composition of government spending, it unconsciously hinders future economic growth and development (Ayinla, Yinusa and Adeoye, 2008). Finally, the incidence of corruption facilitates capital flight from the country. Stolen public funds by the corrupt Nigerian leaders are stashed away in financial institutions in different parts of the world.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, we have examined the dimension of corrupt practices in the present democratic dispensation and its impact on national development of Nigeria. Some of the consequences are infrastructural decay, excessive poverty, poor management public enterprises, brain-drain and acceleration of capital flight from the country. The presence of these maladies militate against economic and social transformation of our economy. It is imperative to address the menace of corruption in Nigeria which is posing a serious threat to national development programmes in our nascent democracy. The following recommendations are suggested as means of reducing the incidence of corruption in Nigeria:

- i. Nigerian leaders at all level of governance must be credible, accountable and transparent. This can be achieved by ensuring that any indicted official should not be allowed to hold public office again.
- ii. Civil society organizations should organize workshops/seminars to create awareness among our public officials on the need for attitudinal change towards corruption.
- iii. Another important strategy to be considered in addressing the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria is removal of immunity clause which protects the president, vice president, governors and deputy governors from the constitution. This would facilitate immediate prosecution of the chief executives that are involved in corruption.

- iv. At present, anti-graft agencies such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) are agents of federal government. They are instruments of the federal governments to witch hunt opposition. It is necessary that these institutions should be granted autonomy without unnecessary interference in their affairs. Again, these anti-graft agencies should establish their offices at all the state capitals in order to address the menace of corruption at state and local government levels and other government institutions.
- v. Recruitment into public service system should be based on merit in order to attract credible and competent personnel in our public service.
- vi. Poverty alleviation programmes are important means of fighting corruption. Those policies that generate employment opportunities for the masses should be introduced.

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