CORRUPTION: AN OBSTACLE TO THE POLITICO/ECONOMIC AND PEACE DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

The pervasiveness of corruption in Nigeria has been recognized as a significant obstacle to her political and economic development. Since the term ‘development’ originally and etymologically means a positive movement towards growth, progress and positive realization of the potentialities of entity or process or event in question, the corruption of the process impedes progress or mares the attainment of political and economic goals. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to reveal the causes of corruption in Nigeria, the factors that create opportunities for it and its effects in her economic and political development. This paper will argue that corruption is a major impediment to the promotion of effective government and a sustained economic growth. This situation leads to an overall corrosive effect on Nigeria’s national development peace.

Keywords: Corruption, Obstacle, Developmentand Peace

1. Introduction

Corruption is one of the oldest and most perplexing phenomenon in human society. It exists in every country in the contemporary world and it is not exclusively a problem of developing countries. The classical concept of corruption as a general disease of the body politics was witnessed in ancient Greece. The Death of Socrates was a case in point. His criticism of “injustice in Athenian society led to his prosecution and a death sentence for allegedly corrupting the youth of Athens” [1]

For him, we should unceasingly question our own beliefs and the beliefs of others in order to seek out genuine wisdom. Thoughts like this make him unpopular among the elites and that caused him his life. But that was not all. For, apart from leading people to knowledge, in the midst of corruption, Socrates remained undaunted. On some occasions, when he was a member of the committee of the senate, he refused to collaborate in evil designs. For instance, in 404 BC, “he refused to take part in a plot to arrest and murder Leon of Salamis, whose property the ruling party wanted to confiscate” [2] On another occasion, "Socrates showed his moral courage by refusing to agree to the demand that the eight commanders who were to be impeached for their negligence at Arginusae should be tried together; this being contrary to the law and calculated to evoke a hasty sentence" [3] . The greatest thing Socrates did for the youths was to drill them in the act of criticism. Thus the youths’ eyes were opened to the extent of asking salient questions on how they were being governed. When the ruling class discovered this, he was arrested and accused of atheism and corrupting the minds of the youths. Socrates was tried and found wanting and thus was condemned to death and was to be executed after a month in prison. An author puts his travel thus: "At the age of 70 Socrates was charged before an Athenian popular court with 'impiety' - with not believing in the Olympian gods and corrupting young men through his constant questioning of everything. He was found guilty and condemned to death. The ancient political philosophers Plato and Aristotle also mentioned the corrupt atmo-
sphere in the classical Greek period. For instance, Plato was worried in his theory of the “perverted” constitutions-democracy, oligarchy and tyranny, that these regimes instead of being guided by the law were serving the interest of the rulers only. "These fundamental general notions of corruption all practically define corruption as dysfunctional. For it is seen as destructive of a particular political, social and economic order, be it monarchy, aristocracy, or polity, the latter a constitutionally limited popular rule, and thus by definition devoid of any function within a political order." This classic conception of corruption continued into modern and contemporary times. Let us now examine the meaning of corruption, its causes, and effects in order establish our theses that it distort economic and political development of Nigeria. Corruption: Definitions and Issues at stake Because corruption has received an extensive attention in the communities, and due to the fact that it has been over-flogged in the academic circles, it has received varied definitions. Corruption has broadly been defined as a perversion or a change from good to bad. What then is actually corruption? The word ‘corruption comes from the Latin verb corrumpere meaning to break up, ruin, waste, adulterate, falsify, seduce, bribe. According to Francis Njoku, since the term ‘development’ originally and etymologically means a positive movement towards growth, progress and positive realisation of the potentialities of the entity or process or event in question, corruption of the process or entity becomes sets of dispositions that impede progress or mare the attainment of finality or goal within a given environment of occurrences in the actualisation of an entity, a process or goal or event [4] This idea is central to the political thought of these prominent philosophers of modern epoch namely, Machiavelli, Montesquieu and Rousseau. For Machiavelli corruption was process by which the virtue of the citizen was undermined and eventually destroyed. "Since most men are weak and lacking in the virtue of the good citizen except when inspired by a great leader, the process of corruption is ever threatening. And when virtue has been corrupted, a heroic leader must appear who in rebuilding the political order infuses this virtue into the entire citizenry. In the same manner, Montesquieu saw corruption as the dysfunctional process by which a good political order is perverted into evil one and a monarchy into despotism. According to Rousseau political corruption is a necessary consequence of the struggle for power. Then he argued "that man had been corrupted by social and political life. It is not the corruption of man which destroyed the political system but the political system which corrupts and destroys man. Specifically, corruption or corrupt behaviour involves the violation of established rules for personal gain and profit. It is efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means private gain at public expense; or a misuse of public power for private benefit. In addition, corruption is a behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role, because of private [gains] - regarding (personal, close family, private clique, pecuniary or status gains. It is a behaviour which violates rules against the exercise of certain types of duties for private [gains] - regarding influence. This definition includes such behaviour as bribery (use of a reward to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust); nepotism (bestowal of patronage by reason of ascriptive relationship rather than merit); and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public goods. Even though some of these definitions of corruption have been around for over decades, the recent development in Nigeria where discoveries of stolen public funds run into billions of US Dollars and Nigeria Naira, make these definitions very adequate and appropriate. A working Definition There have been a number of different attempts at defining corruption. However no precise definition can be found which applies to all forms, types and degrees of corruption, or which would be acceptable universally. According to Oxford English Dictionary (OED) the term corruption in political context is defined as “Perversion or favour, the use or existence of corrupt practices, especially in a state, public corruption, etc.” 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 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, perjury, violation of oaths of office, payment of money for governments’ job not done, manipulation of foreign exchange, import licence frauds, open robbery or looting of the public treasury, creation of “ghost-workers, awarding of complex and bogus contracts as means to defraud and so on [5] The Nature and Characteristics of Corruption Some studies have taken a holistic approach in the discussion of corruption by dividing it into many forms and sub-divisions. These are: i) Political Corruption ii) Bureaucratic Corruption iii) Electoral Corruption iv) Judicial Corruption Political corruption The term political corruption is “an aspect of a broad generic concept” [6] It takes place at the highest levels of political authority. It occurs when the politicians and political decision-makers, who are entitled to formulate, establish and implement the laws in the name of the people, are themselves corrupt. It also takes place when policy formulation and legislation is tailored to benefit politicians and legislators at the expense of democratic citizens. Political corruption is sometimes seen as similar to corruption of greed as it affects the manner in which decisions are made, as it manipulates political institutions, rules of procedure, and distorts the institutions of government.” [7] Bureaucratic corruption It occurs in the public administration or the implementation end of politics. This kind of corruption has been branded low level and street level. It is the kind of corruption that the citizens encounter daily at places like the hospitals, schools, local licensing offices, police, taxing offices and so on and so forth... Bureaucratic petty corruption, which is seen as similar to corruption of need, occurs when one obtains a business from the public sector through inappropriate procedure. Corruption in office involves sales of legislative votes, administrative, or judicial decision, or governmental appointment. Disguised payment in the form of gifts, legal fees, employment, favours to relatives, social influence, or any relationship that sacrifices the public interest and welfare, with or without the implied payment of money, is usually considered corrupt [8] According Prof P.O.J Umehukwu, at bureaucratic organisations, particularly in the civil service, files or works disappear into a thin air with frequent alacrity, only to appear when the filling clerk has been “settled”. “All sorts of euphemisms are used to cloak this type of behaviour in Nigeria. Take for example I.M....which means “Ima Madu” (knowledge of a person) is used to propagate nepotism and sectionalism in interviews to select people for employment or university admission. This entrenches mediocrity, which in turn promotes low productivity and retardation of progress and development” [9] Electoral corruption This includes purchase of votes with money, promises of office or special favours, coercion, intimidation, and interference with freedom of election Nigeria is a good example where this practice is common. Votes are bought, people are killed or maimed in the name of election, losers end up as the winners in elections, and votes turn up in areas where votes were not cast. Judicial Corruption According to P.O.J Umehukwu Unarguably, it is difficult to talk of corruption without reference to the Nigerian judiciary” [10]. It also has an important role in giving opportunities for corrupt acts. But it is very important the degree of separation of power between judiciary and government because it may have very significant influence on judiciary system in playing its key role. The separation of three governmental branches in Nigeria is in very low level and they are not independent of each other. The executive power has obvious dominance over the judiciary branch. Ministry of Justice as a part of the executive branch has the right to control and supervise all courts. So in reality the judicial power is under the dominance of the executive branch. Political leaders who maintain very tight control over the judiciary and law-enforcement sector will typically operate with impunity. To support this view P.O.J Umehukwu asserts: “What has been happening in the country in recent times has nothing to write home about the system. Cases abound where it is accused of ‘sale of justice’, granting of unwarranted exparte injunctions, and unbridled ad-
journments... Recently, many national papers have been awashed with what is happening in our apex court and appeal court in Abuja [11]. The matter is not funny at all”. It was Geoffrey Chaucer one of the greatest English poets who said that “if a gold rusts, what will iron do?” [12] In the same vein, one Nigerian proverb poses “when a thing gets dirty, it is washed in water; when water gets dirty, what will it be washed with?” [13] And a Latin adage capped it all: “Corruptio optimae persimae” The corruption of the best is the worst corruption According Pat Utomi “one corrupt judge is worse and more dangerous to the society than 20 armed robbers “ [14]

1.1. Other forms of corruption include:

A) Bribery: The Oxford English Dictionary defines a bribe as “a reward given to pervert the judgment or corrupt the conduct.” A bribe consists of an offer of money by an outside party to secure desired action from the governmental officials. Bribes can influence the choice of private parties to supply public goods and services and the exact terms of those supply contracts. Buying contracts can also be called Kickbacks when government officials may use their bargaining power with contractors and their discretion in awarding contracts to obtain a fee or service charge for arraigning the contract. A percentage, usually 5 percent, of the contracts is returned or kicked back to the public officials by the contractor. [15]

B) Fraud: It involves some kind of trickery, swindle and deceit, counterfeiting, racketing, smuggling and forgery

C) Embezzlement: This is theft of public resources by public officials. It is when a state official steals from the public institution in which he/she is employed. In Nigeria the embezzlement of public funds is one of the most common ways of economic accumulation, perhaps, due to lack of strict regulatory systems. The International Forum for Democratic Studies estimates that in oil-rich Nigeria some $12.2 billion in government revenue was divested to "Extra-Budgetary accounts" between 1988 and 1994, and there was no record of how these funds were used. Nigerians themselves wait in mile-long lines for gas, and she now imports nearly 70 per cent of its petroleum. Unfinished pipelines, financed by loans from multilateral development banks that have been pocketed by government officials. Oil earnings do less to feed Nigerians than to enrich their corrupt rulers who instantly transfer their pickings to foreign banks.

D) Extortion: The converse of bribery is extortion. It is abuse or threat of power in such a way as to secure response in payment of money or other valuable things. Extortion according to the Oxford English Dictionary "is the act or practice of extorting" it is defined as either to wrest or wring from a person, extract by torture or to obtain from a reluctant person by violence, torture, intimidation, or abuse of legal or official authority, or in a weaker sense by importing, overwhelming arguments or any powerful influence or wresting especially money, from a person by force or by undue exercise of authority or power." The police and custom officers are the main culprits in Nigeria.

E) Favouritism: This is a mechanism of power abuse implying a highly biased distribution of state resources. However, this is seen as a natural human proclivity to favour friends, family and anybody close and trusted.

F) Nepotism: Nepotism as a form of corruption can be explained in psychological term, "The blood is thicker than water" syndrome wanting to help one’s family. This is a special form of favouritism in which an office holder prefers his/her kinfolk and family members. In this context, it means "the granting of public office on the bases of family ties." This is a good example of a point where different cultures have very different attitudes towards some forms of corruption; shows a relationship which corruption and strong family orientation have. A particular study, which helped to explain high levels of corruption in southern Italy and Sicily, notes that corruption is linked to the strong family values involving intense feelings of obligation. That was the case with the Mafia in Italy where some people were seen to have the attitude of anything goes that advances the interests of one’s self and family Patronage This is another form of corruption. The assignment of government positions to
political supporters has long been a practice in politics. While civil service regulations at the national and state level may effectively curtail the number of patronage jobs, political appointments remain at the top levels of government and provide a legitimate way for elected politicians to influence bureaucracy through the appointment of legal executive officials. The process becomes corrupt when appointees are expected to pay for their jobs. The custom of rewarding wealthy campaign contributors with appointments as ambassadors has been traditional in presidential politics. Factors that cause corruption A weak tradition of the rule of law According to West German specialists in 1986 in GDR corruption was in very low levels, which can be explained by the German tradition of respect for law and order. In Nigeria, there is evidence that people do not trust in or do not respect the law. During one of the interviews many tax collectors ensure that, although they are inclined to take bribes, in most cases taxpayers themselves offer bribes. People in Nigeria mainly are inclined to solve their problems with the help of bribes and not with the help of law. Bribing tax collectors, traffic police, and judges publicly perceived as a way of life. Especially, from the 1980s, the bribery was widespread phenomenon and now it has become a norm that in Nigeria, bribes can solve problems more efficiently than law. Hence the Nigerian citizens over time come to see some types of corruption as normal and beneficial. This also affirms the survey results made by the Civil Society Development Union (CSDU). Psychological factor. There are a number of psychological factors that help to explain some types of corruption. Taking into account the internal factors of individuals, one sees that some individuals are "naturally evil" and will commit criminal acts, including corrupt ones in any type of system. With regard to the external factors, individual’s relationship to the group is also important

Definitely, the power of both peer- pressure and peer-comparison can be great, for instance in the words of one artist “when the best of people take bribes, isn’t it the fool who doesn’t?” In other words if individuals see others around them benefiting from corruption, they may well choose to indulge in it too.

The psychological factor has some role of causing corruption in Nigeria. People who work in a position that they can take bribes but don’t use their chance are considered by their co-workers as stupid men. So under the pressure of this factor many public officials during some period of time become corrupted. This is the quagmire that confronts our professionals who return from Europe and America to help build up Nigeria.

The other psychological factor is Fear and it can also encourage people to act corruptly. For example in a hierarchical situation, a subordinate may fear the consequences of not acting in a similar way to his/her corrupt superior. Another type of fear, which was more widespread during so- viet times, is the fear of under fulfilment of the plan that may encourage public officials to act corruptly. This fear may lead individuals to engage in corrupt practices, either in order actually to fulfil the plan or else to appear to have done so (the false reporting syndrome).

This factor may have some role of causing corruption in Nigeria. There is some fixed plan for tax collectors and for custom workers in Nigeria. And there are many cases when tax collectors in order to fulfil the required plan extort some extra bribes from the entrepreneurs. For example, as a businessman narrated during one of the interviews that when tax collector saw that there is nothing wrong with accounting and documents, he requires bribe; otherwise, he has wide range of discretionary power to use the law against taxpayers, even under the threat to stop the production or close the shop.

2. Human weakness also may cause corruption.

Some people find it difficult to reject offers from a person of a "generous" nature. Some officials will accept gifts because they know that they have been particularly helpful to someone and either feels they "deserve" a reward (that is, they feel that a reward is not inappropriate), or else genuinely do not want to offend or embarrass a grateful supplicant.
3. Institutional Factor

Besides the causes of corruption there can be also opportunities for corruption because of the institutional structure. These opportunities are more important for accelerating widespread and high level corruption. So it is instructive to draw a distinction between those elements, which may be seen to provide opportunities for corrupt acts and those, which causes corruption. We can identify here other dimensions of institutional structure that are most critical in bearing on the opportunities for corruption.

4. The monopoly power of officials

The degree of discretion that officials are permitted to exercise may as a matter of fact provide opportunity for corruption.

The degree to which there are systems of accountability and transparency in an institution acts as a catalyst. When officials have monopoly power over provision of a government good, it is crucial for explaining the incidence of corruption without theft. Monopoly power could exist for the legal reason that a certain officials are the only charged with performing a certain task. Whether officials will be in a favourable position to extract bribes from clients depends not only on whether they have a monopoly over their particular activity, but also upon the rules and regulations regarding the distribution of government goods.

The greater the amount of discretion which is given to an agent, the more opportunities there will be for agents to give "favourable" interpretations of government rules and regulations to businesses in exchange for illegal payments. For example, in terms of the level of discretion, when a custom agent is allowed to apply one of several tariff rates to a product, or when a tax inspector is given substantial room to decide whether companies are given deductions or not, there will be an incentive to demand a bribe in exchange for offering favourable treatment.

5. Low Wages

Another factor, which is very important for contributing to corruption, is low wages. For civil servants, the reward structure within the state administration has traditionally been seen as one of the key determinants in the evolution of corruption. If officials are paid wages comparable to those available to performance, the potential gains from engaging in corruption may not be large enough in relative terms to make it worth the risk. If instead, officials in the public sector are paid wages well below those for similar duties in the private sector, then opportunities for corruption may become the principal reason for choosing a public sector post.

In Nigeria, this factor is very actual. Unemployment is at very high level; many people have no regular source of income and for most of those who have a regular income typically is too low to support their family. At the same time, prices have been liberalized since the independence; thereby significantly raising the cost of living for most Nigerians. So given the relative low wage rate, it is inevitable that many employees will look for any means to supplement their meagre ventures, such as bribes. Accordingly, one of the most important reason for corruption in Nigeria is the low wages.

6. Foreign Aid

Foreign aid can promote corruption by: "Strengthening the governmental sector relative to the private sector. Foreign aid is usually provided from centralized government sources to centralized government recipients. This process will subsidize and strengthen the public sector of the recipient country because specific recipients of aid monies have economic incentives to reward their friends, supporters, and specific interest constituents. Based on these realities, foreign aid can in practice work to strengthen the role of the recipient countries' public sector relative to its private sector. Aid has tended to promote centralized economic control and foster a concentration of bureaucratic power in recipient governments. This is corroborated by the fact that
government-to-government transfers often lead to increase in government spending. And as one researcher concluded, “Aid does increase the size of government.” In sum, when existing regimes are corrupt, the result is that these corrupt political regimes can benefit from foreign aid become more firmly entrenched.” For instance, “the foreign aid has very important role in promoting corruption in Armenia”. [16]

7. The Effects of Corruption

The effects of corruption on a nation’s socio-political and economic development are myriad. The negative impact of corruption on economic growth among other things reduces public spending on education. It results in reduced level of investment, as it adds to investment risk. The effect of corruption on education comes from the fact that the government spends relatively more on items to make room for graft. And corrupt government officials would shift government expenditures to areas in which they can collect bribes easily. Large and hard-to-manage projects, such as airports or highways, make fraud easy.

Poverty and income inequalities are tied to corruption. Development projects are often made unnecessarily complex in Nigeria to justify the corrupt and huge expense on it. The new national stadium in Abuja, which is said to have gulped millions of Naira more than necessary, is a case in point.

We can summarize the effect of corruption in Nigeria as follows: corruption is now our role model, the change of value system, people are now very materialistic, cases of kidnapping and ritual mother abound, exploitation of the poor injustices are deep in every sector of our society etc.

8. REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Regardless of where it occurs, what causes corruption or the form it takes, the simple fact remains that corruption is likely to have a more profound and different effects in developing country like Nigeria, than in wealthy and developed societies. This is due to a variety of conditions, which cannot deviate significantly from the nature of her underdevelopment. Because of the corrosive effects of corruption in national development, and given the relative limited resources or poverty in Nigeria, she can least afford to be corrupt.

The biggest loser from corruption is society as a whole. Corruption allows inefficient producers to remain in business, encourages governments to pursue perverse economic policies, and provides opportunities to bureaucrats and politicians to enrich themselves through extorting bribes from those seeking government favours. Thus, corruption distorts economic incentives, discourages entrepreneurship. People who extort, cheat and manipulate one another cannot be good harbingers of positive development; only people who make one another flourish in truth, justice, equity and love can hope for a real socio-political and economic development.

The peace that is the centre of our conference is not to be taken to mean the absence of war. It reflects the rich meaning of the Hebrew term shalom. “Shalom signifies more than just absence of war and force of arm. It is also opposed to everything that disturbs other, understanding or well-being” [17]. Peace is opposed to corruption. There can never be peace where there is corruption. Corruption in Nigeria and in the world breeds hardship and poverty for the majority of the masses. Pope John Paul II in his message for the World Day of Peace Jan 1, 1993 admonished: “If you want peace, reach out to the poor. Poverty is itself a source of conflict. The extraordinary contrasts between rich and poor, between the poorer and richer classes within almost every country are the source of discord and division. These situations of unrest are a permanent threat to peace” [18]. Hence I demand for a new brand of leadership that would restore the public confidence and satisfy the patriotic demand of multinational, multicultural and multi-religious Nigeria. We should work hard and limit the bad influences of wealth and support values that promote social responsibility, excellence, passion for development, genuine democracy built on free and fair election.

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