

Attitudes and Perception of Corrupt Practices among Public Officials in the Agricultural Sector in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

Corruption constitutes greater challenge threatening the wellbeing of our economy more than other social malaise, yet it has not been a major focus of social research. Attitudes and perception of corrupt practices among public officers in the agricultural sector in southwestern Nigeria was therefore investigated. Multistage sampling procedure was used to select 174 public officers from Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) and Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MANR) from Oyo, Ekiti and Osun States. Data was collected using structured questionnaire on respondents' perception and attitude to different forms of corruption. Data were summarized using frequency counts, percentages, mean and charts. Majority (89.0%) of respondents indicated favourable attitude to influence peddling, patronage (78.0%), pork barreling (70.0%), private use of government resources (65.0%) and bureaucratic conflict of interest (56.0%). At least 50.0% of respondents from each of ADP and MANR showed favourable attitude to corrupt practices. More than half (52.3%) of the respondents had favourable perception of corruption. Majority of the respondents from ADP (52.4%) and MANR (52.2%) indicated a favourable perception of corruption. No significant difference existed in attitude ($t=0.954$; $p>0.05$) and perception ($t=0.787$; $p>0.05$) of corruption between respondents from the ADP and MANR. A veritable culture of corruption and a high level of tolerance for most forms of corruption prevailed among the public officials in the agricultural sector in southwestern Nigeria. Public orientation using the media and other public enlightenment strategies in order to engender attitudinal change among corrupt public officials should be pursued as a matter of national emergency.

Keywords: Perception of corruption, corrupt attitudes, agricultural sector, southwestern Nigeria.

1. Introduction

It is well established that Nigeria suffers from endemic and systemic corruption which harms the country's development. The adage that "HIV and AIDs kills an individual, but corruption kills a whole generation, a whole people, and a whole country" implies that corruption is more lethal, more deadly and more devastating than HIV and AIDs. The 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released by Transparency International (TI) shows that corruption has increased in Nigeria with the country currently ranking 134th out of 180 countries surveyed in 2010. In 2008, Nigeria scored 2.7 points and took 121st position out of 180 countries but in 2010, the country's CPI score dropped to 2.1. With this score, Nigeria ranks below Ghana, Cameroun, Niger and Benin on the Transparency International rating scale (Daily Trust, 2009; Online Nigeria, 2009). Oyejide (2008) argued that the associated types and level of corruption in Nigeria may have been influenced and heightened by the direct access of government to oil windfall income in an environment of weak public institutions, capture or near-capture of the state by powerful vested interests and the inability of the citizens to effectively assert their rights.

Much progress has been made in the global battle against corruption giving the evidence of significantly increased attention to the problem in recent time (USAID, 2005). The increasing number of international conventions and domestic laws against corruption, as well as the evolution of Transparency International from a small NGO to a global movement with over 100 chapters around the world, further confirms this trend. Diplomatic, donor, and private sector engagement in the fight against corruption also has increased; however, there is evidence that corruption still remains a serious problem and a significant impediment to development (USAID 2005; Anand 2006, & Sarmiento, 2006).

Although corruption is not a new phenomenon, what is new and worrying is the magnitude and forms it has taken. It has spread its tentacles to every sphere of national life. It is one of the biggest threats to development (Ades & Di Tella, 1996). Corruption benefits the rich and the well-to-do. It enriches the rich and disproportionately affects the poor, unprotected and the underprivileged and thereby it deepens their deprivation. What is more unfortunate today is the growing tolerance and our acceptance of corruption as an inevitable and integral part of the civil society (Anand, 2006). Unless it is checked, the governments and people will have to

pay a very heavy price for the consequent result of lower incomes, lower investments and lower development resulting in volatile economic swings (Olopoenia, 1998).

USAID (2005) argued that corruption undermines social, political, and economic development; cripples democracy and impedes economic growth. It stated further that failure to address endemic corruption ultimately undermines all development efforts with small and medium-sized enterprises being disproportionately affected. By improving the productivity of public expenditures, tracking and reducing leakage, and enhancing citizens' oversight, it is anticipated that anticorruption efforts can support the achievement of goals in agriculture, health, education, social safety net programs, and infrastructure. It was in this vein that Anand (2006) argued that the need of this hour is to stop crying ourselves hoarse about the persistent evil effects of corruption but rather engage in active efforts that will curb the spread. Anand's suggestion therefore implies that remedy, to a large extent, lies with us – We the people. Similarly, Spector (2005) argued that while comprehensive government reforms to address endemic corruption may be needed, sector-specific solutions can be pursued at the same time or even in the absence of political will for more systemic reforms. It is against this backdrop that the study was carried out with the aim of investigating the following specific objectives:

2. Objectives of the study

The following specific objectives were investigated in the study:

1. To determine perception of public officials in agricultural sector to corruption,
2. To analyse the attitude of public officials in agricultural sector to different forms of corruption; and
3. To ascertain the difference in perception and attitude to corrupt practices between public officials in major establishments of the agricultural sector

3. Methodology

The study was carried out in southwestern geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Data was collected from public officers in the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MANR) and Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) which were identified as major vehicles through which agricultural development policies of the nation are implemented (Yekinni, 2007). A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to sample the respondents for this study. The first stage involved the selection of 3 out of the six states that make up the southwestern Nigeria using simple random sampling technique. Oyo, Ekiti and Osun states were thus selected for the study. Respondents (Public officers) were selected from the ADP and MANR in each of the sampled states. Sampling of the ADP staff was accomplished by the sampling of 50% of the zones within each state using simple random sampling technique. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 10% of Management and Field staff in each of the zones. Thus, a total of 82 respondents were drawn from the ADP in the three states. Sampling of public officers from the MANR in the selected states was accomplished by randomly selecting 10% of Management/Principal Officers (GL 12 and above), Senior Officers (GL 8-10) and Junior Officers (GL 4-7) to give a total of 92 respondents from the states.

Data was collected through the use of structured questionnaires. Attitudinal statements were generated on the various forms in which corruption is expressed in the public sector such as Nepotism, patronage, bribery, bureaucratic conflict of interest, pork barreling, influence peddling, private use of public resources, and impropriety as listed by UNDP's Guide to measuring corruption (2008) and Eker (1989). Respondents reacted to these statements on a four point scale of "not at all honest", "slightly honest", "quite honest" and "very honest". Scores of 1, 2, 3, and 4 were awarded to the statements. Total scores for each of the respondent was computed which formed the basis of their categorization into favorable and unfavorable attitudes using the mean score as the benchmark. Also, responses were compared for the various forms of corruption using descriptive statistics, mean and ranking. The purpose of this was to ascertain how the respondents evaluate different corruption scenarios and which behaviours are regarded as more corrupt than others in the agricultural sector. Perception of corruption by public officers was measured by generating a list of 27 perception statements which were responded to on a 3-point scale of Agree, Uncertain and Disagree. Scores of 3, 2 and 1 were awarded to positive statements and the reverse for negative statements respectively. Respondents with scores of mean and above

were regarded as having favourable perception while respondents with scores below mean were categorized as having unfavourable perception.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Attitude of respondents to major forms of corruption

Table 1 presents the attitude expressed by respondents to different forms of corruption. The table reveals that majority of respondents indicated favourable attitude to influence peddling (89%), patronage (78%), Pork barreling (70%), private use of government resources (65%) and bureaucratic conflict of interest (56%). Just about 50% of the respondents indicated favourable attitude to nepotism. This results suggests that majority of respondents will probably not exercise any caution or feel remorse in indulging in corrupt practices in the form of patronage, pork barreling, illegal use of government resources for private gain, and nepotism. It also indicates areas where searchlights should be beamed in efforts at curbing corruption in the agricultural sector of Nigeria.

On the other hand, majority of respondents acknowledged abuse of office (72%), bribery (67%), and impropriety (57%) as unfavourable. Despite the positive response obtained for the latter forms of corruption, the considerable proportion of respondents whose responses showed favourable attitude to these corrupt practices still leaves much to be worried about. Furthermore, one could infer from the foregoing that only few forms of corruption are generally perceived among the public workers in Nigeria as actual dimensions of corruption. This contradicts the findings of Gibbons (1989) and Anderson (2002) in related studies on attitude of public workers to forms of corruption in Canada and Sweden respectively where all the above scenarios were regarded as corrupt by the respondents. This suggests poor awareness of other forms of corruption among the public officers in Nigeria. The too many emphasis on curbing bribery as a major means of combating corruption is another probable factor. For instance, the word "bribery" is a recurring decimal in most cases where corruption is being referred to whether in the media or on the streets. There is therefore, an urgent need to raise the awareness of the various dimensions of corrupt practices among the public if this ugly trend would be reversed.

4.2 Categorisation of respondents based on their attitude to corrupt practices

Table 2 shows that 51.7% of respondents were favourably disposed to corrupt practices, while 48.3% of them had negative attitude to corruption. Giving the various argument on the positive correlation between attitude and practices (Nyantakyi, 2002; Dike, 2008), this result implies that majority of workers in the agricultural sector in the study area have the tendency of indulging in corrupt practices when they have opportunity to do so. Furthermore, the distribution on the basis of respondents' establishment shows that at least 50.0% of respondents from the ADP and MANR showed favourable attitude to corrupt practices. This implies that neither the ADP nor MANR is immune to the monster of corruption, an indication that corruption is not the problem of the political class alone. This finding corroborates the position of Nyantakyi, (2002) who asserted that the simplistic reasoning that corruption is the malignant hobby of politicians is fallacious.

Table 1: Attitude of Public Officers to major forms of corruption

	Scenarios describing some forms of corruption	Not at all honest		Slightly honest		Quite honest		Very honest		Mean
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
A	A senior public officer is in a position to award grant for rural development project. He decides to give the grant to his native community rather than to another community which better meets the criteria for the grant. (Nepotism)	87	50.0	51	29.3	30	17.2	6	3.4	1.7
B	When Mr. A got appointed as the National Food Project Coordinator, he recommended the secondment of his loyal supporters from the ministry to head the state offices of the project. (Patronage)	39	22.4	51	29.3	71	40.8	13	7.5	2.3
C	During a recent advocacy visit by a tractor manufacturing company to agric ministry of nation Y, the spokesman of the company announced that the company would provide training sponsorship for members of staff, which the staff had wanted for years, but only if the company wins the bid as a permanent supplier of agricultural machines to the country. (Pork-barreling)	53	30.5	41	23.6	64	36.8	16	9.2	2.2
D	Mr X, an average farmer wants to get a tractor hiring service from a public Tractor Hiring service but needs the approval of a civil servant in the local government area, so he offers to buy the official a GSM phone. (Bribery)	117	67.2	28	16.1	20	11.5	9	5.2	1.5
E	Mrs. X, a village extension worker, often makes references in the Monthly Technical Review Meeting with farmers to a particular agro-chemical business enterprise while speaking during question period. Mrs. X owns N500, 000 worth of stock in the business enterprise. (Influence Peddling)	20	11.5	44	25.3	41	23.6	69	39.7	2.9
F	A group of extension workers use their knowledge and contacts to establish a part-time consulting firm, which gives advice to private clients under their catchment. The officials are still actively employed by the government. (Bureaucratic conflict of interest)	77	44.3	42	24.1	27	15.5	28	16.1	2.0
G	An agricultural donor agency delegates responsibility for an activity to a subject matter specialist (SMS). The knowledge of the donor about the activity and their follow up is meagre. The SMS leads the activity with great interest and work a lot overtime. The SMS decide to compensate himself economically for the overtime, among other things by letting his wife follow him on an official journey abroad that is paid for by the administration, which the responsible donor neither know about nor approve. (Impropriety)	100	57.5	36	20.7	28	16.1	10	5.7	1.7
H	A local government official who is in charge of tractor hiring service to farmers at subsidized rate, decides to engage the service of the tractors on his family farm during the off-peak season without paying the required amount for the service to the government coffers and disallowing farmers of access. (Private use of public resources)	61	35.1	41	23.6	40	23.0	32	18.4	2.2
I	An agric supervisor purchased produce worth N5M from the government farm where he works but paid only N4.5M to the government purse. (Abuse of Office)	125	71.8	31	17.8	7	4.0	11	6.3	1.4

Table 2: Categorisation of respondents based on their attitude to corrupt practices

Attitude categories	All respondents (n=174)					ADP Staff	MANR Staff
	Scores	F	%	Mean	Std dev		
Unfavourable	9-17	84	48.3	18.2	4.2	41(50)	43(46.7)
Favourable	18-31	90	51.7			41(50)	49(53.3)

Figures in parentheses are percentages

4.3 Perception of respondents of corrupt practices

Table 3 on the distribution of respondents based on their responses to perception statements on corruption shows that 91.4% of respondents agreed that giving of indulgence encourages entrepreneurs to escape clogged bureaucratic procedures of the government and believed that this makes administration more accessible to ordinary citizens. This implies that stiff bureaucracy in public administrative system is a probable temptation why majority of public officers in the agricultural sector perceived corruption as common pitfalls especially to the ordinary citizens of the nation. This is however contrary to the intention of bureaucracy in the public sector which according to Ayee (1994) is to ensure due process and reduce opportunities for corruption. The foregoing thus suggests that bureaucracy will promote corruption either when it is too stiff or too loose. The question therefore is that “at what degree of the continuum will bureaucracy help to discourage corrupt practices in the public sector?”

About 79% of respondents agreed that fraud has assumed a way of life in Nigeria and it is impossible to uproot it completely from the public system. In similar vein, 68.4% of respondents opined that the tradition of using man-know-man to get desires met is age-long in our national system and should not be seen as bad since everyone benefit at one time or the other from it. This implies a wide acceptability of corrupt practices as a way of life among public workers in the agricultural sector in Nigeria, an indication that corruption is fast becoming a cultural problem in our national system as argued by Ladele (2010). Furthermore, 83.9% of respondents agreed with the statement that our socio-economic situations many times leave one with no option than to cut corners through official positions.

Also, 64.9% believed that sharp practices work like a fiscal tool in helping to redistribute political goods more widely than does the official system. This findings suggests that corruption in the public sector is fueled by poverty and feeling of sense of being marginalized one way or the other. This result also corroborates several literatures which argued that a nexus exists between poverty, inequality and corruption (Nyantakayi, 2002; Rose Ackerman 1999, Heidenheimer & Johnston 2002). For instance, Nyantakayi (2002) reiterated that poverty provides the propitious environment for corruption to thrive.

From the foregoing, one can infer that the causes of corruption in the public sector of Nigeria are many and that individual varies in their reasons for perceiving corruption as unavoidable. Therefore, curbing corruption in public sector of Nigeria would require proactive and comprehensive action, using system based approaches and multi-prong instruments of deterrence.

4.4 Categorization of respondents based on their perception of corruption

Table 4 on the categorization of respondents based on their perception of corruption shows that majority (52.3%) had favourable perception of corruption, while 47.7% had unfavourable perception of corruption. Also, respondents did not differ significantly in their perception of corruption according to their establishments, as majority of the respondents from ADP and MANR (52.4% and 52.2% respectively) indicated a favourable perception of corruption. This results when related to findings on table 5 shows a consistence in respondents' attitude and perception of corrupt practices. Therefore, it can be inferred that a veritable culture of corruption prevails among the public officials in the agricultural sector of southwestern Nigeria. This is however contrary to the report of Ghana Governance and Corruption (2000) on a similar survey carried out in Ghana which showed an unfavourable attitude and perception of corruption among majority (76.0%) of respondents; an indication of preparedness of Ghana to fight corruption better than Nigeria. This perhaps explains the reason why Ghana in recent years has continued to make steady and consistent improvement on her Transparency International (TI) rating while Nigeria's score on Corruption Perception Index (CPI) has continually been low. For instance, Ladele & Fadaïro (2011) reported that Nigeria's CPI rating further dropped to 2.4 from 2.7 between year 2009 and 2010. On the other hand, Ghana steadily rose from 3.3 in 2006 to 4.1 in 2010.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents to statements on perception of corruption

SN	Statements	Agree		Uncertain		Disagree		Mean
		F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	Bribe taking and giving is a form of dishonesty	22	12.6	58	33.3	94	54	1.6
2	Fraud has assumed a way of life in Nigeria so it is impossible to uproot it completely	137	78.7	17	9.8	20	11.5	2.7
3	Dishonesty does not hurt pace of development	102	58.6	7	4.0	65	37.4	1.8
4	There is no need to monitor sharp practices closely in since it does not hurt pace of devt.	74	42.5	21	12.1	79	45.4	2.0
5	The concept of immoral act starts from within heart and mind, thus it cannot be checked	111	63.8	28	16.1	35	20.1	1.6
6	Giving of indulgence encourages entrepreneurship by bypassing clogged bureaucratic channels and thus make administration more accessible to ordinary citizens	159	91.4	2	1.1	13	7.5	2.8
7	Dishonesty subverts public interest to favour private interest	65	37.4	25	14.4	84	48.3	2.1
8	Bribes allow officials' to-top their low salaries and gives motivation to underpaid workers.	102	58.6	21	12.1	51	29.3	1.7
9	Fraudulent acts promote apathy and a sense of alienation on behalf of citizens.	40	23.0	30	17.2	104	59.8	2.4
10	Sharp practices help redistribute political goods more widely than does the official system	113	64.9	17	9.8	44	25.3	2.4
11	The process of giving and receiving of gratification reinforces existing inequalities	47	27.0	33	19.0	94	54.0	2.3
12	Gratification hinders administrative development and performance	98	56.3	26	14.9	50	28.7	1.7
13	Taking of gratification enables the excluded groups to gain access to the state's resources	86	49.4	36	20.7	52	29.9	1.8
14	Dishonesty in the public service leads to frustration on the part of the few honest workers.	42	24.1	25	14.4	107	61.5	1.6
15	Giving and receiving of gratification works like the fiscal policy of the government	114	65.5	37	21.3	23	13.2	1.5
16	Due process often confer extra constitutional power on illegitimately constituted group of individuals e.g. kitchen cabinet, special advisers etc.	92	52.9	37	21.3	45	25.9	1.7
17	Immorality grows out of stress and imbalances in society	112	64.4	30	17.2	32	18.4	1.5
18	Financial probity is easier for those who have money, special expertise and special access or connection to prominent figures or personalities.	127	73.0	28	16.1	19	10.9	1.4
19	Bribe taking and giving involves use of scarce and unevenly distributed resources which contribute to the preservation of existing advantages rather than changing the status quo.	119	68.4	27	15.5	28	16.1	1.5
20	Dishonesty is inherent in some cultures and as such should be curbed	63	36.2	17	9.8	94	54.0	1.8
21	The down-trodden only complain of immoral practices on the part of public officers but are sure to do same given the opportunity	91	52.3	36	20.7	47	27.0	1.8
22	The idea of quota system in recruitment and promotion of staff in public offices is unfair	40	23.0	21	12.1	113	64.9	2.4
23	The tradition of using man-know-man to get what you want is age long in our national system and should not be seen as promoting nepotism since everyone has benefited from it	119	68.4	14	8.0	41	23.6	2.5
24	Efforts to promote accountability will redeem Nigeria's image among the committee of nations	42	24.1	14	8.0	118	67.8	1.6
25	The popular saying that those who labour at the altar should not be blame if they reap more than what is appointed for their labour is immoral and should be discouraged.	34	19.5	29	16.7	111	63.8	1.6
26	Our socio-economic situations many times leave one with no option than to cut corners	146	83.9	6	3.4	22	12.6	2.7
27	There is no harm in getting your bite of the national cake anyhow	109	62.6	16	9.2	49	28.2	1.7

Table 4 Categorization of respondents based on their perception of corruption

Perception categories	All respondents (n=174)					ADP Staff	MANR Staff
	Scores	F	%	Mean	Std dev		
Unfavourable	35-51	83	47.7	52.0	5.2	39(47.6)	44(47.8)
Favourable	52-65	91	52.3			43(52.4)	48(52.2)

Figures in parentheses are percentages

5. Test of Hypothesis

Table 5 shows that no significant difference existed in attitude ($t = -0.954$; $p > 0.05$) and perception ($t = -0.787$; $p > 0.05$) of corruption between respondents from the ADP and MANR. This result shows that perception of what is corrupt and what is not; and disposition of respondents from both establishments to various scenarios depicting corruption is not significantly different. This indicates that neither the ADP nor the MANR could be adjudged as fairer in terms of pervasiveness of corruption in our public sector.

Table 5: Difference in perception and attitude to corruption between the ADP and MANR respondents

Variables	df	t-value	p-value
Perception (ADP, MANR)	172	-0.787	0.432
Attitude (ADP, MANR)	172	-0.954	0.342

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that a veritable culture of corruption prevailed among the public officials in the agricultural sector of Southwestern Nigeria. Neither of the ADP nor the MANR was fairer in terms of pervasiveness of corruption. Apart from bribery, abuse of office and impropriety, public officials in the agricultural sector were tolerant of the many other forms of corruption as they perceived them as job-related opportunities to better their lots. There is a dire need to make known and enforce compliance of the public officials in agricultural establishments to the various forms of corruption using the media and other public enlightenment campaign strategies. The existing media campaign programmes that suggest bribery as the only form of corruption should be repackaged to incorporate other forms of corruption in its message. This will ensure that audience is treated with the required full dosage of therapy necessary to curtail further spread of corruption in the public sectors of the nation.

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