

# History of Corruption and National Development: The Case of Nigeria

Iyanda Kamoru Ahmed, Ph D

Department of History and International Studies, Nigeria Police Academy, Wudil, Kano

OROGBEMI ELIAS OLAJIDE

Department of History And International Studies, Nigeria Police Academy, Wudil Kano

Jeje Eunice S. A.

Department of History and Strategic Studies, Federal University, Dutsinma, Katsina State

## Abstract

Nigeria, with a population of over 140 million people, is the most populous country in Africa: one in five Sub-Saharan Africans is a Nigerian. The country is also rich in both human and natural resources. Billions of dollars were generated yearly from the sale of crude oil and yet nothing to show for this huge revenue in terms of infrastructural development and the living standards of Nigerians. This state of affairs has been attributed to the prevalence of corruption. This paper examines phenomenon called corruption. It discusses the causes and impacts. The paper attributed the causes of corruption in Nigeria to socio-cultural and the political and economic situation of the country. The paper contends that corruption has been responsible for the instability of successive Nigerian administration since independence to date. Besides, it creates negative image and loss of much needed revenue for developmental purposes: it devalues the quality of human life: robs educational and health sectors of revenues; it slows down administrative processes thereby making the execution of government policies to be ineffective. The paper recommends among others, enlightenment of the citizen on the danger of excessive materialism and the culture of "get rich quick". Besides, the property of any corrupt official should be confiscated and should also be imprisoned for life to serve as a deterrent to others.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Development, Kleptocracy, Prebendalism

## Introduction:

Corruption, like cockroaches has co-existed with human society for a long- time and remains as one of the problems confronting third world countries. Put differently, it is as old as society itself and cuts across cultures, nations and classes of people. It is undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges of our time; a challenge that not only leads to impoverishment and loss of lives but also threatens the stability of the society (Igbuzor, 2008).

In Nigeria, corruption is one of the many unresolved problems that have robbed the nation of development. It remains a long-term major political and economic challenge for Nigeria (Sachs, 2007). According to Alabi and Fashagba (2010), Nigeria's search for enduring socio-economic, political and technological development as well as efficient and productive utilization of allocated resources in the new millennium has been undermined by pervasive corrupt practices in the polity.

Corruption has been the primary reasons why the country has not developed. This is evident in Transparency International consistent rating of the country as one of the top three most corrupt countries in the world. The effect of this rating by Transparency and other similar organizations according to Koladec (c.f. Ofajide, 2000). is that the country's position in the corruption perception index makes her a sort of persona non grata. The situation has become pathetic to the extent that far back in 1983, The Weekly Star (c.f. Achehe, 1988) remarked that keeping an average Nigerian from being corrupt is like keeping a goat from eating yam.

It is against this background that this paper examines corruption in Nigeria. The paper is structured into seven sections. The first section is introduction. The second section is the conceptual clarification. The third focuses on theoretical framework while the fourth delves into causes of corruption in Nigeria. The fifth section examines corruption in Nigeria. The sixth section discusses the impacts of corruption on national development. The last section deals on conclusion and recommendations.

## Conceptual Clarification

It is pertinent to attempt a clarification of the two important concepts which are germane to the understanding and explanation of this paper. These are the concepts of corruption and development.

## Corruption:

The concept corruption has been defined in various ways by different scholars. Khan (1996) sees corruption as an act which deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of private-regarding motives such as wealth, power or status. Gire (1999) defines corruption as

a betrayal of trust resulting directly or indirectly from the subordination of public goals to those of individuals. Thus, a person who engages in nepotism has committed an act of corruption by putting his family's interest over those of the larger society.

Gibbons (1976), conceives corruption from the perspective of politics. For him, political corruption is the use of a public office in a way that forsakes the public interest, measured in terms of mass opinion, elite opinion or both in order that some form of personal advantage may be achieved at the expense of that public interest. In the same vein, Obayelu (2007) defines corruption as an effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means for private gain at public expense; or misuse of public power for private benefit.

For the World Bank (1977), corruption is the abuse of public office for private gain. Public office is abused through rent seeking activities for private gain when an official accepts, solicits or extorts bribe. Public office is also abused when private agents actively offer bribes to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit. Public office can also be abused for personal benefit even if no bribery occurs through patronage and nepotism, the theft of state assets or the diversion of state resources.

Therefore, corruption can be described as the deliberate diversion of state resources from the satisfaction of the general interest to that of selfish (personal or particular) interest.

### **Development**

Like most concepts in social sciences, there is no consensus among scholars as to its definition. According to Lawal and Tobi (2006), development has been one of the most ambiguous terms in social science discourse and it continues to generate debate among various scholars. Similarly, Olowu (1986) contends that development is probably one of the most depreciated terms in the social sciences. In spite of this however, consensus seems to have emerged. Development is now viewed as bi-focal involving both socio-economic transformation and improvement of material conditions of the people as a whole and an increasing effectiveness and institutionalization of political system (Olowu, 1986: 2). For Todaro (1981), development is a multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty. Seer (1977) sees development as not only capital accumulation and economic growth but also the condition in which people in a country have adequate food and job and the income inequality among them is greatly reduced.

National development can therefore, be described as the process whereby people of a particular state harness their resources with a view of having a meaningful development.

From the above definitions, there seems to be a nexus between corruption and development. In view of the above, development is seen as the capacity of a government or system to manage resources effectively and efficiently in order to improve the lots of the people and then corruption can be thus regarded as obstacles to good governance and development,

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical position of this paper derives mainly from Ekeh's (1975) Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement. This work has been described as one of the most cogent attempts to explain fundamental social dynamics in Africa; which underlie and bedevil the political process (Joseph, 1987). Indeed, it remains one of the most cited articles on African politics (Olutayo and Olutayo, 2009: 44).

The works attempts to account for the amoral public realm in Africa. According to Ekeh (1975), the historical root of the crisis in Africa can be attributed to the alien nature of the states.

He contended that the present states in Africa[Nigeria inclusive] evolved not from within the society as was the case in most parts of western Europe but from outside, as an imposition of the colonial authorities. The process of setting-up this alien structure on largely artificial political formations which brought together formerly separate groups led to the development of public realm as two publics rather than one in addition to the private realm which was coterminous with the society. The civic public refers to the state/government institutions such as military, bureaucracy, political parties, courts, universities and legislatures- all of which were imported wholesale from Europe. The primordial public was an emergent social formation that evolved out of the dynamics of colonial process to satisfy some of the personal and group demands that could not be met by the colonial and post colonial states. An example is the ethnic groups.

The major difference between the two public was in terms of morality. The primordial public is moral while the civic is mostly amoral. The former is moral because it reflects the base and elemental priority pledged to community membership and a strong sense of citizenship, loyalty and participation while the latter is amoral because it is superficial and largely baseless. It is a place of survival for people to tailor their activities within its amoral state towards fulfilling their expected moral obligations and benefiting/sustaining the primordial public which must not falter (Olutayo and Olutayo, 2009: 44). In the words of Ekeh (1975) it is perfectly normal and accepted behavior to exploit one's position in the public realm to pursue private advantages (ibid; p.107).

The theory has been criticized on his assumption of dual publics. According to Joseph (1987), the two

publics actually overlap. A second criticism put forward by Joseph (1987), is that the root of some of the problems identified by Ekeh [1975] lies in indigenous Africa political organizations. Put differently, they neither emerged nor were they wholly imported. Osaghae (1994) also criticized the theory on the grounds that it failed to explain the basis for material gain motivation of politics. According to him, any theory which fails to do this is an inadequate theory, considering the centrality of materialism in the legitimacy crisis in Africa (1994:77).

Ekeh's [1975] argument that people plunder the civic public to enrich their kinsfolk has been criticised by Olutayo and Olutayo [2009]. They argued that political actors in contemporary Nigeria plunder both the primordial and civic publics to enrich themselves and their nuclear families. In their very words, primordial is nothing but machines to get to power; returns no longer go to the villages (2009:46).

However, despite the limitations of the theory, it is useful in the sense that it enables us to understand the prevalence of corrupt practices as well as the amoral nature of public realm in Nigeria and other developing societies or countries.

### **Causes of Corruption**

Scholars of different ideological beliefs have given different explanations as to the prevalence of corruption in developing societies. Maduagwe (1996) attributed the causes of corruption in Nigeria to the nature of Nigeria's political economy, the weak institutions of government, dysfunctional legal system, culture of affluent and ostentatious living and extended family system pressures. Corruption in Nigeria can be attributed to the following factors:

The influence or pressure of extended family system and community can be attributed to corruption in Nigeria. There is allegiance to the extended family and community in Nigeria. Because of this, when one climbs up the social and political ladder, one is expected to and under pressure to give gifts, money, contracts and job to people of one's community. Therefore, when one bows to these pressures, one slips into corruption.

Value system has equally contributed to corruption in the country. It is such that society does not check the background of wealthy people in the society. Once a wealthy man comes up in a society, he or she is instantly worshiped and honoured to the extent that chieftaincy titles are given to him in all nooks and crannies of this country. The Churches and Mosques hail and honour him.

Furthermore, Nigerian one of the poorest paying nations in the world. This is a state in which there is no man-hour value as economic reward. Besides, even the monthly meager salary is not even regular thereby giving room to workers to make ends meet by compromising their duties in order to meet up with the exigencies of their daily obligations.

The lack of political will or commitment to fight corruption by the political leadership is yet another factor responsible for corruption in Nigeria. The lukewarm attitude of those saddled with the responsibility of enforcing the law and bringing probity has rather aided corruption. The organs of government, namely: legislature, executive and judiciary as well as the police and other security agents sometimes treat cases of corruption with *laissez-faire* and lackadaisical attitude, especially if the culprits are highly placed and Influential. All the investigations in both public and private as well as the ones by both the National and State Houses of Assemblies in most cases fizzle out.

Moreover, the prevalence of corruption has been attributed to lack of honest leadership. All administrations since independence to date whether military or civilian have been characterized by corruption and abuse of office. Under military, morality given-in to brute force, laws were used as tool of oppression; theft of government property became a virtue and self aggrandisement and pursuit of personal wealth replaced national interest (Oko, 2002).

Besides, government control of the economy has also been attributed to the causes of corruption. Nigeria operates a mixed economy with almost government dominant. Both federal and state government engage in various areas of economic activities ranging from oil business, to transportation, hotels, insurance, public utilities and tourist industries. Politicians view state owned enterprises as major sources of wealth, power and means of rewarding party faithful, friends and relatives.

Marxist scholars are of the view that corruption is a method that the capitalist class that emerged from colonialism uses to accumulate wealth. They contended that inflation contracts, over-invoicing, collection of kick-backs and buying off of public companies at give away prices are primitive means of accumulation of capital that the emergent bourgeoisie in post-colonial countries or states utilise (Igbuzor, 2008).

Legacy of colonialism is another factor responsible for corruption in Nigeria. The colonial state lacked transparency and accountability to the people. If there was any iota of accountability, it was to the metropolises in London, Lisbon, Paris or elsewhere but not to Africa people and institution. This explains why after flag independence, the post-colonial state and government have remained alien to the Africa, Nigeria inclusive.

### **An Overview of Anti-Corruption Efforts in Nigeria**

The history of corruption in Nigeria dates back to the 1950s when the first panel of enquiry was set-up to

investigate African Continental Bank-Nnamdi Azikiwe's affairs. Dr Azikiwe was alleged to have abused his office by allowing public funds to be invested in a bank in which he had an interest. The Justice Stafford Forster Sutton Commission of Enquiry investigated the allegation and in his report indicted Dr Azikiwe and because of this, he had to transfer all his rights and interests in the bank to Eastern Nigerian Government, (Nwankwo, 1999).

In 1962, Chief Obafemi Awolowo was dragged to what Nwankwo (1999) referred to as court of accountability. This led to an investigation of the relationship between erstwhile Awolowo's government and the National Investment and Property Company- a private outfit said to be indebted to the Western Regional Government to the tune of 7,200.00 pounds. On 20<sup>th</sup> June 1962, a Commission headed by Justice G.B. Coker was appointed to investigate the allegations and the commission later indicted Awolowo in its report. Consequently, the Western Regional Government acquired all the property owned by the company.

The cry against corrupt practices in Nigeria became disturbing under the Gowon administration because of the alarming rate of different forms of scandals resulting from the importation and exportation of goods, particularly in relations to ports congestion. By March, 1974, the country was rocked by cement scandal. The federal government placed an order for two million metric tons of cement with various firms in the United States, Romania and Union of Soviet Socialist Republic [USSR]. The supply was to be made through National Supply Company. However, in a sudden change, the Ministry of Defence (which import 2.9 metric tons for its construction projects), placed an additional order for 16.23 metric tons, despite the fact that the price for a ton of cement at that time stood at 25 dollar and freight 15 dollar, Nigeria paid 115 dollar per ton. Somebody therefore, stood to gain 75 dollar for 16.23 million tons. Consequently, the federal government set-up a committee headed by Justice M.B. Belgore to investigate the alleged irregularities. The committee indicted the Permanent Secretary Ministry of Defence and he was dismissed along with other officers. Surprisingly, criminal proceedings were never brought against the culprits.

General Murtala Mohammed after coming to power set-up Assets Investigation panel to probe the assets of all former governors, the administrator of East Central State and some commissioners that served in the Gowon's administration. The Panel indicted ten [10] of the twelve [12] governors and subsequently had their assets confiscated. The total value of assets confiscated from the governors was over 10 million naira at that time (Lawal and Tobi, 2006:5-6).

The Obasanjo's military administration was enmeshed in the scandal surrounding 2.8 billion naira missing from the coffers of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (Nwaobi, n.d). Consequently, The Shagari's administration instituted a probe panel headed by Justice Ayo Irekefe to get to the bottom of the scandal. The said missing money was lodged with the London branch of Bank of Credit and Commerce International between 1977 and 1980. For three years the men of power and influence appropriated the accumulated interest on the principal. When they could not sweep the matter under the carpet, the money was returned to the coffers of the government without interest.

The Second Republic was not free of corrupt practices. The politicians of the period were involved in different corrupt practices of different shades. The period was characterized by gross abuse of powers by virtually all public officers. The political office holders used their offices to siphon and misappropriate public funds. This is what Joseph (1987) referred to as prebendal politics. Between 1979 and 1983, Nigeria earned about 40.5 billion naira and squandered it. The external reserve of 2.3 billion naira which the administration inherited was wiped out and replaced with a staggering external debt of 10.21 billion naira [Nwaobi, 2003].

The military administration of Major-General Muhammadu Buhari which succeeded the Shagari administration was committed to wiping out corruption from Nigeria through War against Indiscipline [WAI] crusade. Tribunals were set-up at both the federal and state governments to probe the political gladiators of the era. Specifically, Justice Mohammed Bello Tribunal convicted 51 politicians and placed refund orders on them for their ill-gotten wealth. The Babangida administration which came on board on 27<sup>th</sup> August, 1985 did not show any commitment to the anti-corruption crusade of its predecessor. The administration launched the country into what Lawal and Tobi (2006:646) described as eight years of Kleptocratic rule characterized by corrupt practices of different shades. Below are some of the highlights of Babangida's corrupt practices.

- 2 billion dollar Gulf war windfall in 1991
- 30% of oil revenue directed to frivolous uses throughout the time
- Huge extra-budgetary spending: 1989=15.3 billion naira; 1990= 23.4 billion naira; 1991=35 billion naira; 1992= 44.2 billion naira; 1993[by August] = 59 billion naira.
- 200 million dollar siphoned from Aluminum Smelter project
- 400 million naira wasted on Better Life project
- Colossal corruption at the NNPC, example, 101 million dollar for the purchase of strategic storage facilities (Lawal and Tobi, 2006:646).

The Okigbo panel instituted by Abacha administration to investigate Babangida's regime indicted him and the Central Bank Governor then of frivolous and secret or clandestine spending. The Abacha administration did not fare better in terms of corruption. He was reputed to have stolen 1.13 billion dollars and 413 million



British pounds sterling apart from 386.2 million dollars defrauded through fictitious and inflated contracts (Tell, 2006).

The Abdulsalam administration cannot be absolved of corruption. The Christopher Kolade panel set-up to review contracts, licenses and appointments made under his administration came out with a shocking revelation. The panel specifically, in its final reports reviewed 4072 contracts, 576 licenses, 807 appointments, 768 awards and 111 approved all made within five months. The panel submitted that the 4072 contracts cost the country 635.62 billion naira as against 88 billion budgeted for in 1998 budget. The panel also revealed the depletion of the foreign reserve which as at the end of 1998 stood at 7.6 billion dollar but shrank to a 3.8 billion dollar by May, 1999 (The News 30 April, 2000).

The Fourth Republic has also been bedeviled by all kinds of social vices particularly perjury and corruption. These include bribes for budget approval by the National Assembly, payment of huge amount of money before being confirmed as ministerial nominees by the legislators, outright embezzlement and looting of public funds and the use of excessive money during election campaigns, etc. (Oloigbenla, 2007: 109-110). For instance, the first Speaker of the House of Representative under the present dispensation (Fourth Republic) Alh. Salisu Buhari was removed from Office because of certificate forgery; late Senator Chuba Okadigbo was found guilty by a seven-man committee chaired by Senator Idris Kuta for frivolously awarding contracts for Christmas gifts up to the tune of 22.9 million naira. His Deputy, Haruna Abubakar was alleged to have spent 16.9 million naira and an additional 32 million naira on Sallah celebration [ibid]. The former Senate president Adolphus Wabara was also removed from office because of corrupt practices. He was alleged to have been involved in a bribery scandal which engulfed the senate Education Committee. Prof. Fabian Osuji, then minister of education was sacked by the boss [Obasanjo] for having given 55 million naira bribe to members of the National Assembly in order to get approval for the inflated budget of his ministry (ibid).

Over 17.7 billion naira was recovered from the erstwhile Inspector General of police, Mr. Tafa Balogun by the Economic Financial Crime Commission [EFCC]. He was also found to have colluded with some governors and powerful and influential members of the society to cover up tracts of serious crimes. For example, Balogun was alleged to have collected 250 million naira from Dr Mbadinoju [former governor of Anambra State] to cover up the murder of the former chairman of Nigerian Bar Association [Anambra State] Mr. Igwe and his wife in September, 2002.

Some former governors like Goje, Daniel and Alao Akala were recently arrested by E.F.C.C. for corruption. Goje was accused of fraud of 37.9 billion naira in loan obtained from 27 banks and for which repayment would last till 2015. Alao Akala of Oyo state was charged of fraud of 25 billion naira, Doma 18 billion naira and Daniel of 58 billion naira [Daily Trust Tuesday October 11, 2011:5].

### **Impacts of Corruption on National Development**

A country faced with the problem of corruption cannot be viable economically neither can the system generate enough support necessary for the survival of the democratic system. Corruption has robbed Nigerians of benefits of economic development because scarce resources that should have been used for developmental projects have gone into private foreign accounts. For instance, in 2006, the erstwhile chairman of EFCC, Nuhu Ribadu [2006] estimated that Nigeria lost 380 billion U.S. dollar to corruption between independence in 1960 and the end of the military rule in 1999 [cf Ogundiya, 2010:236].

According to former British Prime Minister Tony Blair [ibid] this amount is equivalent to all the western aid given to Africa in almost four decades and also equivalent to 300 years of British aid for the continent.

It stifles business that are unwilling to engage in this nefarious activity; it also eventually destroys the companies that yields to this practice, thus halting or at least delaying considerably, the march towards economic progress and ultimately sustained development [Gire, 1999].

It results in loss of much needed revenue, decrease in the level of foreign direct investment and loss of viable businesses by Nigerian banks. It diminishes national prestige and respect; leads to brain drain, civil unrest, business failures and unemployment; election rigging, absence of law and order and failure of government institutions. (Ribadu, 2003). According to Ribadu (2006), corruption is worse than terrorism because it is responsible for perpetual collapse of infrastructure and institutions in Nigeria.

It has adversely affected governance and the larger social structure. It has crippled the state's ability to deliver for its citizen's enjoyment of ever the minimum social and economic rights, including health and education. This results in retardation of economic development and the deterioration of public infrastructure that has been put in place.

Similarly, Mauro (1979) argued that corruption reduces the quality of public infrastructures and services thereby affecting the quality of life of the people. The kick-backs and other forms of corruption will affect private investment and economic growth.

It has made politics a big business in Nigeria. This is because anything spent to secure a political office

is regarded as an investment whereby the people feel that they must be settled before casting their votes. It has also affected the electoral process and election funding in Nigeria.

Furthermore, corruption erodes the civil and political rights of the people. It worsened the problem of low level of political participation and political apathy because of disappointment, frustration and violence that normally attend electoral fraud and political corruption that characterized every transfer of political power.

It subverts the democratic principle by denying the masses political sovereignty. It is those who could afford the expensive electoral competition could stand for elective offices. It also widens the gap between the state and the civil society.

### Conclusion

The paper examined the concept called corruption. It discussed the various definitions offered by different scholars and also analysed the causes of corruption in Nigeria. The paper attributed the causes of corruption in Nigeria to culture and weird value system, poor reward system, lack of political commitment or will to fight corruption. The paper also delved into the history of anti-corruption efforts in the country. It analysed the impacts of corruption on national development. Some of the factors identified were reduction in the quality of public infrastructures and services; making politics a big business; eroding the civil and political rights of the masses, subverting democratic principles, etc,

### Recommendations

- Prosecution of those found to have corruptly enriched themselves. There should be no sacred cow, people found to be involved in any corrupt practices should be prosecuted and if found guilty should be jailed for life and their property should be confiscated by the government.
- There is need for government as well as organized private sector to increase the wages and salary of their employees in order to improve their living condition as well as reduce poverty. This will inevitably reduce their vulnerability and susceptibility to corruption.
- Besides, Nigerians should be re-orientated to a better value system. This is imperative because Nigerians have for long been living on the survival of the fittest and grab-whatever- comes-your way mentality. Their re-orientation to a good value system would go a long way in the fight against corruption. There is also the need for public enlightenment in discouraging excessive materialism and the culture of get-rich quick.
- In the final analysis, if these recommendations are implemented by the government, they would assist in minimizing corruption in the country.

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