

## ICT and the challenge of anti-corruption fight in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*Information and Communication Technology (ICT), has been identified as a viable tool for diminishing corruption by enhancing transparency and accountability of government administration. Many roles have been attributed to ICT, and one of them is that through governance systems it can support the fight against corruption by raising accountability through digital footprints, raise transparency by publicizing regulations and fees, and reduce face-face interaction where most requests for bribes usually take place. A major hindrance in dealing with public sector or government bodies is corruption. No doubt, corruption has been around since time immemorial and indeed, may well be an engrained trait of human nature; that is why, most governments and technologists are interested in figuring out what means may be created to combat it. Therefore, high levels of corruption are present where institutional mechanisms to combat corruption are weak or not used and proper safeguards are needed by improving the enforcement of rules which is clearly the best way to combat corruption completely.*

**Key words:** Corruption, Anti-corruption, ICT, E-governance

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Citizens must have access and means to public information in order for democracy to function, which will make government of the people, by the people and for the people real. Lack of access to information results in a non-participatory society, in which political decision-making is not democratic. Therefore, access to information concerning governance of the state allows individuals to exercise their political and civil rights in election processes; challenge or influence public policies; monitor the quality of public spending; and demand accountability. Scholars have argued that access to information and transparency are thus prerequisites for democracy as well as a compass in the fight against corruption (Ake; Hearcock; Sasaki; Hellstrom & Al-sagaf, 2012)

According to United Nations (2010), Information and Communication Technology (ICT), has been identified as a viable tool for diminishing corruption by enhancing transparency and accountability of government administration. Many roles have been attributed to ICT, and one of them is that through governance systems it can support the fight against corruption by raising accountability through digital footprints, raise transparency by publicizing regulations and fees, and reduce face-face interaction where most requests for bribes usually take place. Mobile phones as one of the ICT target can effectively empower citizens by allowing people to collaboratively gather and share evidence of corrupt practices. In other words, ICT can effectively assist citizens willing to challenge the systems that condone corruption.

For example Andersen, in a study of the impact of e-government measures on the **World Bank “Control of corruption” index**, found that the implementation of e-government solutions often resulted in a considerable reduction of the levels of corruption: by conservative estimates, moving from the 10th percentile to the 90th percentile in the e-government implementation implies a reduction in corruption equivalent to moving from the 10th percentile to the 23rd percentile in the control of corruption measurement. Similarly, Shim and Eom studied the correlation between the usage of ICTs (measured by the UN e-Government readiness index, the UN e-participation index and the level of internet penetration) and the level of corruption (measured by Transparency International’s CPI). They conclude that the country’s position on the e-readiness and e-participation indices<sup>1</sup> is negatively correlated with the levels of corruption, meaning that a good positioning on the e-readiness and e-participation indices goes together with lower levels of perceived corruption. Both studies argue that the use of ICTs should be combined with administrative reform but that the order of implementation does not matter (Grönlund, 2010, Sofia, 2013).

In many parts of the world, a major hindrance in dealing with public sector or government bodies is corruption. No doubt, corruption has been around since time immemorial and indeed, may well be an engrained trait of human nature; that is why, most governments and technologists are interested in figuring out what means may be created to combat it. Scholars has noted that high levels of corruption are present where institutional mechanisms to combat corruption are weak or not used, and where a system of simple internal checks and balances does not exist. In such cases, entrenched political elite dominates and exploits economic opportunities, manipulating them in return for personal gains (Fangzheng, 2010, Oye, 2013).

Corruption is a multifaceted phenomenon supported by differing historical and socio-economic conditions in each country. It exists at all levels of society. It has been on news that Nigerian government officials are well known for their self servicing style of governance. That is the reason Achebe (1984) wrote that “the Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership”. But I must say that the attitude of the ordinary Nigerian citizen has become, “my turn shall come”. From top leadership in private and public sectors to gas station attendants, taxi drivers, mechanics and room service attendants in hotels we see attitudes and actions that support or encourage corruption. Thus, a culture of corruption seems to be merging – a culture that does not frown at illicit sources of wealth.

Nigeria’s poor ranking has been as a consequence of several failed attempts in the past to wipe out corruption or reduce it to a tolerable level in the polity. From the Jaji Declaration in 1977 by OlusegunObasanjo; the Ethical Revolution of Shagari in 1981-1983; the War Against Indiscipline by Buhari in 1984; the National Orientation Movement by Babangida in 1986; the Mass Mobilization for Social Justice by Babangida in 1987; the War Against Indiscipline and Corruption in 1996 by Abacha; to the Anti- Corruption Act 2000 again by President OlusegunObasanjo, this is the first time in the series of several efforts to fight corruption that the attempt has the force of law with severe sanctions (Ayola, 2006). This resulted to the establishment of anti-graft agencies, such as Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) in 2000, and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2003 after the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF) named Nigeria amongst the twenty three non-cooperative countries frustrating the effort of international community to fight money laundering (EFCC Establishment) Act, 2002. These two later agencies have brought new tools and vista to the fight.

The question is: why is it that in spite of this effort, Nigeria continues to rank poorly in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index? And the stigmatization of the international community continues? It has become more pervasive as years go by. It has continued to weaken institutions, discourage investment and retards economic development. The menace of corruption has also led to diversion of developmental resources of the society to private or personal use. So, what are some of the challenges? This paper will show how ICT can make or mar anti-corruption crusade

## 2. Conceptual framework

### What is Corruption?

No doubt, corruption is the unethical or illegal advantages procured through official position. Justice Mustapha Akanbi in Iyanda (2012), the distinguished former chairman of ICPC classified corruption in Nigeria into three categories, these are:

1. Street level corruption which describes corruption in administration as shown in day to day experiences of the citizens in their interactions with officials.
2. Business corruption that occurs among low to medium sized business with or without active connivance of the equivalent public sector official; and
3. High level corruption, which involves huge sums of money in high power centers in finance, public service and administration.

**Corruption** according to Oye (2013) is the misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit. This misuse manifests in many ways: bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, or speed money

**Black law dictionary** however defines corruption thus: ‘An act done to give some advantage inconsistent with the official duty and rights of others. The act of Official or Judiciary person, who unlawfully wrongly uses his

*position or character to procure some benefit for himself or the right of others”* The dictionary in the second segment of its definition says that: “Corruption is the act of doing something with intent to give some advantage in consistent with official duty and right of others or official’s use of a station or office to produce some benefit either personally or for someone else contrary to the right of others”

**The World Bank** defines corruption as: *The abuse of public office for private gains. Public office is abused for private gain when an official accepts edicts or extorts a bribe. It 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 thereof state assets or the diversion of state resources (World bank, 1991).* **The World Bank’s 2011 guide** identifies corruption as “one of the single greatest obstacles to economic development and social development”. It goes on to state that “through bribery, fraud and the misappropriation of economic privileges, corruption diverts resources away from those who need them most”.

### 3. Impact of Corruption on Nigeria’s Economic Growth and Development

Many reasons have been put forward as probable causes for the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria that have contributed to problems of economic growth and development (Okolo and Akpokighe, 2014). According to Okolo & Akpokighe (2014), it ranges from non- conformity to religious tenets, imparted values and ideas and ideas alien to our culture, ethnicity which encourages favoritism and nepotism, a weak legal system which is honored in the breach than observance. The political bureau in its report mentioned such causes as excessive materialism generated by our individual capitalist order which emphasize personal wealth without regard to the collective interest and welfare of the larger society. Other causes of corruption advanced by Okolo & Akpokighe, (2014), includes poverty, illiteracy, get-rich- mania, statism, and wrong attitude to public property, absence of a welfare scheme which cushions effect of unemployment, retirement, large families, and quest for power, double standards and low level of patriotism.

Thus, Nwaobi, cited in Okolo & Akpokighe, (2014) posited that Nigeria must be one of the very few countries in the world where a man’s source of wealth is of no concern to his neighbor, the public or the government. Wealthy people who are known to be corrupt are regularly courted and honored by communities, religious bodies, social clubs and other private organizations.

According to Okolo & Akpolighe (2014), the cost of corruption can be classified into **four factors**“, political, economic, social, and environmental.

1. **Politically**, corruption constitutes a major obstacle to democracy and the rule of law .In a democratic system, offices and institution lose their legitimacy when they are misused for private advantage. This is harmful to our democracy. Our democracy and political leadership cannot develop in a corrupt climate.
2. **Economically**, corruption leads to the depletion of our national wealth. It has led to the use of scarce public resources to finance uneconomic high profile projects such as power plants pipelines that cost billions whereas if these were channel towards building schools, hospitals and roads or the supply of Electricity and water to rural areas which are basic needs of life. This has hindered the development of fair market structures which has led to job losses and also affects investment.
3. **Socially**, the people have lost their trust in the political system. In its institutions and leadership, they have developed non challant attitude and general apathy towards government policies resulting in a weak civil society.
4. **Environmental degradation** is yet another consequence of corrupt systems. The non enforcement of environmental regulations and legislation has led to the pollution of the environment in Nigeria. Careless exploitation of Natural resources from oil and minerals by domestic and international agents hassled to ravaged natural environments affecting the health of her citizens .Most environmental devastating project are given preference in funding, because they are easy target for siphoning of public funds into private pockets.
5. **Educational systems** are not also left out in corruption saga according to Fundaoga & Mtodziezy (2000). They opined that the impact of corruption in education has a very demoralizing impact on the

young generation- there exists a growing conviction that money is more important than individual learning effort and intellectual capacities. The forms of Corruption in educational system includes: buying” positive grades, buying” entrance examinations to secondary schools and universities, selling” tests, final examination forms giving additional private lessons system of incentives for selecting specific text books

#### 4. Anti-corruption and Citizen Participation through ICT

Civil society’s struggle against corruption has as a major element, (alongside the enforcement of the law and structural reform of public institutions), the introduction of transparency in place of the obscurity and secrecy in which corrupt practices thrive should be encouraged. Civil society organizations in developing countries are demanding greater transparency as a key component in fighting corruption and empowering people living in poverty. Increased transparency is often dependent on political will, and civil society around the world is actively challenging their governments to open up systems to public scrutiny. When governments do not have the capacity and/or the will to launch administrative reforms to remove the opportunities for corruption, adding external pressure on officials by increasing the risk of exposure might be a workable alternative (United Nation, 2010).

However, UN (2010) noted that ICT can support democracy and human rights by enabling and expanding citizens’ social mobilization. A better informed and active citizenry, who can put pressure on national institutions to be accountable and responsive to citizens’ needs and priorities, is a fundamental component of a functioning democracy “Access to means of communication and, in particular, to electronic communications is now seen as necessary for achieving development and, therefore, should also be considered as an economic and social right.

Governments should take responsibility for facilitating and subsidizing access to electronic media to ensure equitable enjoyment of this right, to combat poverty and to achieve their development goals”. ICTs can also be used for citizen mobilisation and awareness raising campaigns. Mobile applications can be designed to reach the majority of mobile subscribers through outreach/publicity campaigns using SMS. Organisation running such initiatives need to build a substantial data base of targeted subscribers with active phone numbers, which can prove challenging (Hellström, 2010). An example of similar approaches is the campaign run by #InternetNecesario in Mexico, which used a combination of twitter, blogs posts and media outreach to put pressure on Mexican legislators to eliminate a 3% tax on internet access which was passed without civil society consultation (Technology for transparency Network, 2010).

ICTs can also be used to mobilize people and raise awareness through art. In Tanzania, Chanjo, a collaborative project between musicians, aims to combat corruption through art, mobile phones and social media. The Chanjo project is structured around concerts and tours throughout the country followed by public discussions and debates about corruption. The music tour organised by the artists through Tanzania is coupled with the free distribution, through mobile phones and internet, of songs about corruption issues. The use of internet and social media allowed the project to reach almost 11,000 people between October and December 2011 (Spider, 2011)

#### 5. The role of ICT in Curbing Corruption

When a country implements more e-Government it always leads to a considerable reduction in corruption. A test carried out on the effect of the variables of GDP per capita and the degree of “free press” by Anderson (2009). The study found that the growth rate of GDP per capita is always significant, whereas a free press did not seem to influence changes in corruption. Integrating e-government in anti-corruption programmes: **United Nations Development Program (2006)**, identified the following Using e-government to fight corruption.

1. **Building political commitment:** Even if anti-corruption and e-government strategies are in place this does not guarantee that corruption will be curbed. Commitment of decision makers (and adequate financial resources allocation) is key to the success of all government anticorruption programmes, including those with an ICT component. Backed by political leadership and commitment, ICTs could lessen the traditional resistance for change.
2. **Providing legal support:** e-Government can lead to transparency provided that the legal framework supports free access to information. Until a few years ago most countries still had strict national secrecy laws. These have been repealed in favour of Freedom of Information Laws in the U.S. and much of Europe, but only after decades of lawsuits. Secrecy laws are still in effect in many of the developing

- countries. While increasing citizen's access to information, governments must also address risks to privacy and security.
3. **Selecting appropriate technologies:** The cost of introducing ICT in government organizations is high. Selecting appropriate hardware and software is also a challenge due to the rapid advancement of new technologies. ICT specialists need to work closely with public officials to ensure that the design of the ICT system is coordinated with other reform processes. Capacity and resources need to be in place for systems maintenance, upgrades and troubleshooting. Securing the ICT system is important to prevent corruption by those who know how to manipulate the ICT system.
  4. **Ensuring interoperability:** Overlapping roles and responsibilities among government departments and lack of cross-departmental cooperation in developing common hardware, software, data collection methods, and rules and procedures proves a challenge when designing a national e-government system. However, e-government can be used as an entry point to improve the system and ensure interoperability.
  5. **Promoting access and use:** Increasing availability of information on the Internet is not sufficient. Providing universal access, promoting literacy, fostering people's participation in governance are some of the key challenges in any e government applications.
  6. **Ensuring scrutiny and sanctions:** Parliamentary scrutiny is often cursory or non-existent. Those responsible for missing or misused funds are rarely sanctioned except where the actions are politically motivated, and in those cases officials may be unfairly victimized.
  7. **Showing evidence:** Much of the evidence linking e-government with reduction in corruption is anecdotal. Only in a couple of cases has e-government's impact on corruption been audited independently. Systematic surveys of citizens and other stakeholders can help establish the linkage more clearly and will also provide invaluable feedback on the parts of the system that need improvements..

#### 6. ICT and the Challenge to Anti-corruption Crusade

In spite of potential of information and communication technology, the use of ICTs for anticorruption is not a magic bullet. The realisation of its full economic factors, significant challenges in terms of internet access, confidentiality, and costs related to the implementation of ICT solutions remain to be addressed (Hellström, 2009 and 2010). Sofia (2013) identified four issues

1. **Political environment** The prerequisite for the success of ICT solutions is an enabling political environment that promotes and protects free speech. These conflicts with the experience of many countries, in which governments have made efforts to control the development and use of ICTs, have remained unsuccessful (Sofia, 2013).
2. **Potential for misuse** ICTs can be used and misused for social mobilisation. A case study of the 2007/2008 Kenyan presidential election crisis illustrates how digital technologies can serve as catalyst for predatory behaviours such as ethnicity-based mob violence (Goldstein and Rotich, 2008.). There is also a risk of ICTs being misused by undemocratic governments for control. Such discussions have arisen in Uganda in relation to the debate about the proposed Interception of Communication Bill, which sought to authorize security agencies to intercept phone, e-mails and postal communication for national security reasons. Infrastructural environments:
3. **Security and confidentiality.** There are significant security challenges associated with the use of mobile phones for reporting corruption. If the system is poorly designed or vulnerable, the whistleblower risks being identified or the message intercepted. In China, for example, the government has allegedly established a SMS monitoring programme to monitor and censor text messages, by setting up SMS surveillance centres around the country (UNICEF, 2008). According to USAID, plain text

messages should not be considered secure, particularly when it is possible that the receiver or sender has been placed under surveillance. Many governments are also putting pressure on operators to register SIM cards to be able to connect a person to the SIM; some countries already require identification for purchasing a SIM card, which may facilitate the identification of the user. The challenge is therefore to secure confidentiality when sensitive information is being communicated.

4. **Operational issues:** Operational issues can also be obstacles to the effective use of ICTs. They include usability and the limitations of mobile phones (small screens, short messages, and complicated commands), regulations and legal aspects of mobile applications, costs, payment, revenue sharing, etc. Some services are tied to a specific operator, creating challenges of interoperability between operators and roaming between countries (Hellström, 2009; Sofia, 2013).

Globally, over a billion people have access to the internet and can use new information and communication technologies for development and good governance. However, a vast majority of the world's population is still without internet access and thus cut off from these tools and innovations (Spider, 2010; Sofia, 2013). While mobile phone penetration is progressing at rapid pace, obstacles remain to universal internet access. In particular, the lack of backbone links limits the connectivity between different regions of the world. The lack of reliable access to electricity in some developing countries can also be an obstacle, making it difficult and costly for people to charge their phones and other devices, especially in rural areas.

## 7. Conclusion

The paper has tried to show that introduction of ICT can reduce corruption by improving the enforcement of rules, lessening the discretion of officials, and increasing transparency. Yet, while ICT eliminates many opportunities for corruption for those who do not understand the new technology fully, it opens up new corruption vistas for those who understand the new systems well enough to manipulate them. Therefore the paper further show that proper safeguards are needed by improving the enforcement of rules which is clearly the best way to combat corruption completely in Nigeria. The paper concludes that the introduction of e-Government can play a major role in this context as it automates several processes and that automating existing bureaucratic processes that are defective will not yield good results.

**This paper will recommend** three issues as identified by Diamond cited in Animashaun (2007).

1. a system must be put in place for monitoring official conduct and exposing wrongdoing especially through ICT.
2. a credible system be built for assessing charges for wrongdoings and for punishing convicted wrongdoers.
3. building a framework for insulating institutions of watchdog, exposure and punishment from the control and manipulation of the very state actors they are meant to monitor

Okolo & Akpokitighe (2014) identified the following as **further recommendation** to tackling corruption in Nigeria.

1. **Formal, Informal and non-formal Education:** The greatest vehicle for cultural transmission towards a transformation of prevailing social paradigm is education. In its **formal form**, the curriculum of learning across Nigerian must be overhauled to make for real mental and intellectual independence. In its **non-formal** manifestation, conferences, workshops, camps, and other non-formal learning situations must be widely utilized to re-educate citizens on the fact that real living occurs only when individuals have sound moral values, or at least, consistently and seriously aspire to it. Informally, the media will be mobilized as a crucial element of mass mobilization towards an appreciation of the Nigeria's authentic social, cultural and economic environment.
2. **Religion as a nation building institution:** Nigerians listen to their spiritual leaders, much more than they do politicians and policy makers. The pulpit ought to be mobilized as a knowledge and faith-based platform for reaching the souls of Nigerians and in directing them towards nation-building.

3. **Promotion of the “African” nation state:** For the past 50 years, Nigerians have been struggling in vain to assimilate the artificially imposed colonial boundaries. It is time to promote the greater African nation-state and de-emphasize the cosmetic divisions that is filled with antagonistic ethnic groups.
4. **Strengthening of anti-graft institutions:** Strong anti graft institutions are a necessity across Nigeria state, as in any other part of the world. Governments across Nigeria should appoint credible and determined individuals who may even be nationals of other African countries, to take up the fight against corruption in the high and low places. A strengthened judiciary is a necessity in this respect.

*Note: To win the war on corruption, Aluko (2009) & Iyanda (2012), reiterated on Obasanjo’s slogan of ‘no sacred cows’ should be put into maximum use by prosecuting all the known corrupt political ‘heavy-weights’ in the society, because they are the major contributors to making the national corruption law inoperable*

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