

# Newspapers' Constitutional Responsibility of Holding Government Accountable to the People in Nigeria: Some Seemingly Unassailable Challenges?

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## Abstract

This paper reviews roles newspapers can play in curbing corruption and what seemingly unassailable challenges they faced in facilitating the anti-corruption crusade by Olusegun Obasanjo administration between 1999 and 2007 in Nigeria. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (amended) says the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people of Nigeria. The paper observes that while newspapers can fulfill these social and constitutional responsibilities in both tangible and intangible ways, the effectiveness of newspapers in acting as forces against corruption in Nigeria is, however, threatened by factors both intrinsic and extrinsic to the media such as official immunity and secrecy, lack of access to official information, moral obligations to the ethnic community, professional integrity and responsibility, editorial independence, physical threats, harsh economic realities and more. The paper concludes that unless these challenges are surmounted, newspapers may largely remain stymied in their anti-corruption roles and functions and hardly be useful in any efforts to curb corruption in the country.

**KEY WORDS** Newspapers, Corruption, Anti-Corruption Crusade, Challenges, Constitutional Responsibility

## 1. Introduction

Corruption like law, truth and beauty has no commonly accepted definition. Corruption appears a nebulous term; it is behaviour. A wide range of behaviour can be termed corruption. Hence corruption covers a wide spectrum of human conduct. Moody-Stuart (1994) makes a helpful distinction between two types of corruption which he categorized as "grand" and "petty" corruption. Grand corruption is political corruption usually involving senior public officials and politicians with social, economic, political and bureaucratic powers. The latter is crime involving common criminals and individual activities of officials such as policemen, customs officers, magistrates, etc.

In Nigeria, practitioners of grand corruption are public office holders, political leaders and bureaucrats who participate in public administration and hold positions of public trust as heads of state, governors, ministers, legislators, chairmen of councils, commissioners, secretaries, special advisers and personal assistants, heads of government departments, and the councillors. This makes corruption elitist and the seat of government the fulcrum of grand corruption.

Official corruption in Nigeria has evolved from the petty to the grand, from occasional and uncommon phenomenon to an endemic, widespread and organized feature of society (Odekunle, 1986). Nigerians regard public office as the primary means to gain access to unlimited wealth. Public office opens the widest avenue for public officers to loot, embezzle, defraud, swindle, peculate, misappropriate, rob, cheat, thief and steal public resources with impunity ((Oko, 2002; Nwabueze, 2007; Agbese, 2008; Smith, 2007). So, whether serving or retired, Waziri (2002) says "our Nigerian military, political, economic and policy elite have remained predatory and rent-seeking and see the country as a bazaar" (p. 41).

Corruption is Nigeria's biggest single problem. It has not only sapped public trust in government, but it has cost the government and the people of Nigeria poverty and underdevelopment (Ayua, 2010). A report done by Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission in 2005 revealed that the country's successive governments stole and misused about 400 billion US dollars during the last four decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Smith, 2006). Corruption in Nigeria squanders the vast resources available to this nation and has been a factor in the country's ailing economy, crumbling infrastructure, clanging poverty, pauperized citizenry, moral regression, disunity, violence and crime (Smith, 2007).

A report of the Political Bureau (FRN, 1987, p.215) once stated that corruption "pervades all strata of the [Nigerian] society—from the highest levels of the political and business elites to the ordinary person in the village". Many (Oko, 2002; Nwabueze, 2007; Smith, 2007; Agbese, 2008) now believe that corruption permeates all aspects of public affairs and the Nigerian society. General opinion is that public affairs and private business

can hardly make progress without indulging in some corrupt practices. In government, the judiciary, the universities, the police, the army and other institutions, corruption has become the main engine of activity. The country's image as bastion of bribery, venality, and deceit has remained constant over the years and unswerving with perception surveys detailed by Transparency International, (TI). TI, the German-Berlin-based watchdog of global corruption ranks Nigeria among the most corrupt countries of the world. It ranked Nigeria first in 1995, second in 1999 and 2003. In 2004 Nigeria was ranked as the third most country in the world. Current TI Global Corruption Perception Indices consistently put Nigeria in the top quintile of countries most affected by corrupt politics and petty bribery (Transparency International 2012, 2013).

Reducing corruption in Nigeria certainly requires intensive and protracted efforts but one way to make public servants more accountable, Pezzullo (1998, p. 30) says, is to include "an aggressive and unfettered press" and to promote an efficient and proactive media. Thus, as Staphenurst (2000:2) avers, "the media can play a critical role in promoting good governance and helping to curb corruption by investigating and reporting incidences of corruption in a professional and ethical manner". This paper explores roles newspapers play in curbing corruption and draws attention to the seemingly impregnable challenges of official immunity and secrecy, lack of access to official information, moral obligations to the ethnic community, professional integrity and responsibility, editorial independence, physical threats, and harsh economic realities etc which make fighting-corruption in Nigeria impracticable. The paper concludes that unless these challenges are surmounted, newspapers may remain stymied in their roles and functions and doomed to failure in any anti-corruption efforts.

## 2. Review of Anti-Corruption Efforts in Nigeria

Past governments in Nigeria acknowledged fact of corruption and have tried to stem the pandemic but, as President Olusegun Obasanjo himself (2000) says, "the cure often turned to be worse than the disease". At best, according to Odekunle (1986), purported crusades against corruption often are reduced to occasional intra-elite struggles, squabbles and backstabbing. Our corrupt elite have controlling influence on the form, pattern, and degree of effectiveness of control of corruption in Nigeria, and have always frustrated laws and structures erected against corruption.

The Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau CPIB, established by the Muritala/Obasanjo administration in 1975 achieved very little because the same corrupt leadership frustrated the Bureau by outlawing the use of affidavits as instruments for anti corruption purposes (Ekpu, Agbese, and Mohammed, 1985 May 27). In the Second Republic, President Shehu Shagari acknowledged the 'mounting rubbish' of corruption but public officials under him and the legislature frustrated the Code of Conduct Bureau under Isa Kaita (Babarinsa, 1986 May 12; Ekpu, Agbese, Mohammed, and Giwa, 1985 May 27).

General Mohammedu Buhari administration pursued its War Against Indiscipline (WAI) with an apparent sadistic zeal but ended up protecting another group of corrupt military officers with yet a Public Officers Protection Against False Accusation Decree in 1984 (Ekpu, Agbese, Mohammed, and Giwa, 1985 May 27). General Ibrahim Babangida is believed not to have made any serious attempt at stopping corruption and reputed for being "benign in treatment of corruption allegations among principal officers in his government" (Gboyega 1996). If anything, Ogbeidi (2012:9) says corruption reached an alarming rate and became institutionalized during Babangida's regime. Nevertheless the regime set up a Committee on Corruption and other Economic Crimes and War Against Corruption (Diamond, 1991; Bello-Imam, 2004). The late General Sani Abacha launched his War Against Indiscipline and Corruption WAI-C, and sermonised on the devastating impact of corruption but his crusade lost much credibility when he merely "deployed six acting administrators found guilty of corruption" and himself "proved most stupendous in public treasury looting" (Rupert, 1998; Agbo, 1994).

The government of President Olusegun Obasanjo waged war against corruption and established the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) but lack of political will and commitment to attacking high-level corruption diluted his government's actions in pursuit of greater transparency through these agencies (Aiyetan, 2008 December 1). He left office with anyone scarcely applauding him for his anti-corruption war (Soyinka, 2009 March 4). The general impression remains that the Obasanjo government has gone "down in history as the most corrupt administration in Nigeria" (Agbese, 2008, p. 201). Political leaders under him frustrated the anti-corruption structures they themselves put in place. The corrupt leadership in 2002 for instance, amended the ICPC Act to further weaken it for the flimsy reason that:

ICPC is daily turned into a veritable weapon of political manipulation and assassination of characters leading to serious credibility gap in the operations of the commission and doubts on its objectivity, transparency, fairness, relevance and continued existence (Ekenna, 2002 December 9).

The Goodluck Jonathan government professes a waged war against corruption, observance of due process and

respect for rule of law as well as repositioning and strengthening the anti-corruption agencies in his Transformation Agenda but *The Punch* (2013, October 21) says President Goodluck Jonathan has, three years in office, failed to demonstrate purposeful leadership and only pays lip service to fighting corruption and prudent financial management. A 2012 report to the United States Congress by the Secretary of State John Kerry which alleges massive, widespread, and pervasive corruption at all levels of government and the security forces also insists that President Goodluck Jonathan government has not implemented laws effectively, and that officials frequently engage in corrupt practices with impunity (Adedija, 2013 April 21).

Major financial scandals within the period not handled properly by President Goodluck Jonathan administration consist of massive fraud, corruption, and inefficiencies in the operation of the fuel subsidy programme including failure of EFCC to produce any convictions from its investigations and trials (*Sunday Punch*, 2012, November 25; Adedija, 2013 April 21). The oil subsidy probe which involved Representative Farouk Lawan in bribery allegations (*Vanguard*, 2012 June 15) and scores of other corruption cases like the stealing of 32.8 billion naira (\$210 million) Police Pension Fund (Shuaib, 2012 April 17; Daniel, 2013 April 10; *Sahara Reporters*, 2013 January 29), as well as fraudulent contracts awards, money laundering, embezzlements and misappropriation or outright theft of billions of naira by public officials and politicians are evidence that officials frequently engage in corrupt practices with impunity (Adedija, 2013 April 21). Cases like the purchase, with public funds, of bulletproof cars for Stella Oduah, a Minister of Aviation certainly do not demonstrate purposeful leadership and a commitment to fighting corruption and prudent financial management. For, according to one newspaper editorial,

At an exchange rate of N155 to \$1, Oduah's vanity would establish eight cottage clinics of N30 million each, or fund the sinking of 50 boreholes in a country where only 17 per cent of its 160 million people have access to pipe-borne water, according to a UNDP report (*The Punch*, 2013 October 21).

Some even believe that present poor financial status of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is a clear indication that the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan is not committed to fighting corruption (King, 2014 February 06).

### 3. Role of Newspapers in Combating Corruption

Media play key roles in investigating allegations of impropriety in public affairs and exposing corruption and corrupt practices (Stapenhurst, 2000). These roles become even more important when existing political institutions are weak and inefficient in ensuring accountability of public servants (World Bank, 1997). Credible media, therefore, exercise strong influence over the public and play an important part in revealing improper and unfair administrative actions and corruption (Pezzullo, 1998).

Mass media as main expression of public opinion have long been recognized (Coronel, 2009) as having social and constitutional responsibilities in monitoring government, exposing its excesses and ensuring that governments are accountable to the governed. The usefulness of the media as active participants in the responsibility to rid society of corruption and promote good government is undeniably established and guaranteed in most constitutions of nations. Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 states that:

The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people (FRN, 1999).

This constitutional role requires the newspapers as social institutions to be responsive to social problems and needs, to serve the political system by providing information, discussion, and debate, and as watchdogs over government (Coronel, 2009). This suggests that the press can strengthen democratic institutions by conscientiously and effectively investigating systematic corruption (Center for Democracy and Governance, 1999) that now holds Nigeria society hostage (Smith, 2007). As Stiglitz (2002, p.29) remarks, "there has long been recognition that on their own, governments and their leaders do not have the initiatives to disclose let alone disseminate information that is contrary to their interest". But free speech and a free press not only make abuses of government powers less likely, they also enhance the likelihood that basic needs will be met (Stapenhurst, 1999). Accordingly, media can act as a force against corruption in ways that are both tangible and intangible (Stapenhurst 2000). Tangible ways media can curb corruption take a variety of forms. Most spectacular among them is when corrupt bureaucrats or public office holders are impeached, prosecuted or forced to resign after their misdeeds are made public (Stapenhurst 2000). In Nigeria, the most spectacular manifestations media potential for curbing corruption had been the forced resignations of Mallam Salihu Buhari, Evan Enwerem, Chuba Okadigbo, Adolphus Wabara, and more recently, Patricia Ette, Adenike Grange and others for wholesome scandals of forgeries, falsifications and contract scams. Githongo (1999) also relates the role the independent Kenyan press played in the firing of a Minister of Health, Mr. Donald Kimutai in 1996.

Simon (1998) provides contemporary examples from Latin America where a surge in media reporting on corruption helped force no fewer than three heads of state from office, namely, Ecuador's Abdala Bucaram, Venezuela's Carlos Adres Perez and Brazil's Fernando de Mello. When public officials lose their jobs because they have been found guilty of corruption, Stapenhurst (2000:5) says, "a variety of related deterrents to corruption such as public humiliation, loss of prestige, social standing and income, among others, are simultaneously reinforced". Furthermore, the political turbulence that follows the ouster of high public officers helps increase the standards of public accountability, thereby providing another tangible deterrent to major corruption by others in the future (Stapenhurst 2000).

Even when reporting on outright corruption or other questionable behaviour by public figures does not lead directly to indictments, prosecutions or impeachments, Barbash (1994) says it can still help shape public hostility to such activities that can ultimately lead to electoral defeat for individual politicians or indeed, for entire governments. Sometimes mere inquiries by journalists – in the absence of a story's publication or of conclusive proof of wrongdoing – can lead to a tangible response from authorities eager to protect their reputations and those of the institutions they represent (Marsden and Robinson 1987).

Media can also curb corruption by identifying flaws and weaknesses in laws and regulations that create a climate favourable to corruption (Stapenhurst 2000). In so doing, authorities are prompted to change or consider changing those laws and regulations. Such pressure for changes to laws can come in form of specific recommendations from a medium such as was the case of WTLC Radio in Indianapolis which concluded a series of pieces in 1984 and 1985 that examined past corruption in the government of the US State of Indiana and criticized weaknesses in existing laws which it said could lead to more corruption; and the effects of Miami Herald series which prompted US authorities to amend federal banking regulations (Investigative Journalism 2000).

Journalists' stories can sometimes play critical roles in reinforcing the effectiveness of public anti-corruption bodies. By simply reporting in a regular detailed way on the work and findings of anti-corruption bodies, Stapenhurst (2000) maintains, journalists can build public support for work of anti-corruption bodies and reinforce their legitimacy, thus creating a climate that make politicians less inclined to meddle in or undermine their operations.. When aggressive reporting seizes upon and amplifies key findings of prosecutors, investigators, legislative committees or other public bodies that investigate corruption, Macdonell and Norris (1997) say, this cannot but raise public pressure for corrupt officials to be held to account and may also encourage witnesses to wrongdoing to step forward and testify about what they know.

Most often though, independent media can act in less tangible ways as indirect check on the sort of corruption that would otherwise flourish in the absence of weak political competition. By simply presenting a variety of points of view and thus fuelling public debate in a way that enhances political and economic competition, Stapenhurst (2000) says, independent media can enhance accountability, open up alternatives to dealing with corrupt networks, and create incentives for political leaders to move against corruption.

And when independent news media foster debate of the sort that encourages members of the public to get involved politically, and when the media take the lead in pressing for enhanced civil liberties in which they have a strong vested interest like freedom of expression, Johnson (1997) says, they play "a counterweight role against factors closely correlated with high levels of corruption: low level of mass participation in politics and weak protection of civil liberties". Otherwise, Agbaje (2001) mourns, Nigeria may remain essentially, a society with low levels of political participation, openness, transparency and accountability, and respect for individual rights.

#### **4. Challenges against Newspapers Curbing Corruption in Nigeria**

Like other institutions, newspapers often face incentives not all of which work to enhance the overall quality of information and the transparency of decision making. Journalists who seek to expose corruption often have to face both moral and physical challenges. In Nigeria, the most obvious challenges to raising public awareness about corruption, investigating and reporting incidents of corruption in a most professional and ethical manner are media accountability and transparency, moral obligation to ethnic community, official secrecy and lack of access to information, government policies and actions, restrictive laws and legal actions.

In many developing countries, a common criticism one hears, according to Stapenhurst (1999), is that the press acts in unprofessional ways and is itself unaccountable. In Nigeria, unprofessional acts by the press often border on questions of sensationalism, considerations of context, accuracy and fairness, balance and completeness, integrity and responsibility. The Nigeria Press Council (1994, September 6) found cause to express concern at the press which "... in a bid to sell, rattles the sensibilities of decent people in society, not just by the bold exhibition of lack of finesse but, more unfortunately, by blatant publication of unverified allegations of a nature bordering on criminality". In most cases, according to Akinfeleye (2003, p. 11), "little attention is paid to accuracy, coherence, truth, clarity, fairness, balance, objectivity, and simplicity in news reporting." Where the press is "characterized with prejudices, hatred, lies, and fraud" and "with lack of balance and equal hearing" (Agbese 1997, p.65) then, its ability to detect and combat corruption cannot be meaningfully increased.

Indeed, the Nigerian press is even considered to be corrupt, prejudiced, and dishonest. The love of money and its



corrupting influence are part of all professions but the complicity of journalists in corruption has left a sour feeling of disgust, frustration and anger among practitioners leading to disgust, frustration and anger (Okonta 1991, Ajibade 2002, Izeze 2006). One Editor could not hide his dismay and I quote him at length:

The brown envelope is, perhaps, the most eloquent evidence that journalists accept gratification in the course of their duties. This, like nothing else, has tarnished the image of the Nigerian press considerably. Most of us have at one time or another decried this practice with a rather high-minded feeling of hurt. My understanding is that the gratification is now offered in more acceptable colours of the envelope such as white or blue. A more serious variant of this is the practice by some news editors to ask their reporters to make daily returns to them. Reporters who cover the political beat, said to be the most lucrative, make such returns. Those who don't are yanked off the beat by their news editors or editors (Agbese, 2001).

Bribe taking and corruption have blossomed into a big malaise that is killing the profession (Ajibade 2002). Clearly, where the press is not sufficiently clean, effective, strong and independent to lead reform because it is, to some extent, part of the corruption problem (Aiyetan, 2002 May), efforts to sanitize society and participate in the campaign against corruption are weakened.

The challenge of moral obligation of the Nigerian journalist to his ethnic community is as threatening and devastating as graft. According to Dare (1996), the Nigerian press all too often mirrors the ethnic, political and religious cleavages in society when it should seek to rise above them. Sometimes it is even held captive by the cleavages. Little wonder Agbese (1997) describes the Nigerian press as "characterized with prejudices, hatred, lies and fraud". Where this happens, the press can hardly reinforce its legitimacy and independence since "the responsibility of the press in exposing systematic abuses has been eroded by ethnic and religious considerations" (Dare, 1997, p.457).

In Nigeria, the media's effectiveness in the struggle to get rid of corruption is challenged greatly by lack of access to information. The culture of official secrecy transmitted throughout the Commonwealth by the United Kingdom, still poses a strong challenge to the fight against corruption in Nigeria. Along with plethora of other laws, Official Secrets Act prevents civil servants from divulging official facts and figures and also bars anyone from receiving or reproducing such information. According to *Daily Trust* (2012), the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), signed into law in May 2011 has so far been implemented only in the breach of its provisions than in compliance by government agencies. Despite an increasing number of cases at the national and state level by civil society groups to test the FOIA, there has only been one reported successful prosecution since it was passed into law (Adepetun & Segun August 1, 2013). The right to know is inextricably linked to accountability. Freely accessible information pertaining to government activities is necessary to ensure accountability for government officials.

In addition to constrained access to information, Nigerian journalists do not enjoy fundamental freedom to fulfil their social and constitutional responsibility of holding government accountable to the people. Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 is not judicable. Thus instead of protecting freedom of the press with absolute force of law as in the US First Amendment, journalistic freedom is not only qualified but curtailed by the same constitution in Sections 39 and 45 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999. The former places prior restraint in ownership of broadcast media in spite of deregulation in the sector and ongoing democratization and validates and justifies any law made for purposes of preventing disclosure of information received in confidence while in service of state or government or armed forces and police or state security service even after retirement. Section 45 further limits freedom of expression and of the press by abrogating all rights and giving constitutional backing to all laws made in the interest of national security, public safety and order, public morality, public health and for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedom of other individuals in society. Certainly, these constitutional provisions are in dissonance with anti-corruption spirit, and appear to confirm suspicions that government is benign with corruption (Adedjoja, 2013 April 21; King, 2014 February 06).

Nature of corruption as a clandestine crime makes it difficult to be reported. Even in spite of a country like Nigeria where culture of impunity and lawlessness utilize brute force to quell or silence the public, World Association of Newspapers says "coverage of organised crime and corruption has put journalists in the line of fire" (UNESCO 2012). That is, the risks associated with reporting corruption are so high that journalists often are subjected to threats, intimidations, physical force, and outright loss of life. Consequently, out of fear of punitive reprisals, or simply out of malicious acquiesce or out of the corrupt generating influence (Odekunle, 1986), journalists hardly ever summon courage and investigative journalism to fight corruption. The unwritten norm is that

corruption by highly placed officials... though criminal, is not usually enforceable.  
For ... the official position of the offenders discourages the law enforcement

agencies from proceeding against them. Hence corruption constitutes...an offence beyond the reach of the law (Onigu, 1986, p.17).

Thus in Nigeria today, the reality appears that generally, independent journalism is not as common as it may seem, and there is an unspoken threshold beyond which criticism is not easily tolerated. Between June 2002 and September 2003, Human Rights Watch (2003), recorded more than 50 cases of reported abuses against journalists and other violations of freedom of expression. Between 1992 and October 2013 many journalists have been brutally murdered by unknown assailants in Nigeria (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2013). These numerous incidents are stifling and neither support free, independent, effective, and proactive media nor defend their key roles in investigating and exposing corruption.

In addition to lack of political freedom for professional journalism practice, newspapers as businesses need economic freedom. The Nigerian media have long operated under harsh economic realities which often threaten their viability "to an extreme degree (Olukotun, 2005). In 1999, the government put newspapers and magazines on the Value Added Tax regime, along with commercial vehicles and spare parts. This tax policy contradicts international conditions for the promotion of an independent and pluralistic press especially in Nigeria where almost all raw material inputs in the industry are imported and publishers already pay VAT on newsprint consumption, hard paper, chemicals and other production inputs, as well as pay electricity and telephone bills. Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) says, "to impose VAT on the press is a retrogressive step to make newspapers and magazines cost more ..." (Ebisemiju 1999) and this has net effect of denying public access to information and education of the sort that increases standards of public accountability and encourages members of the public to get involved and curb corruption.

## 5. Conclusion

It is safe to conclude that corruption is doubtlessly hampering Nigeria's socio-economic and political progress, creating social instability, crumbling infrastructure, education, health and other services, and perpetuating low standards of living. Violence and crime now characterize our national life. Countless efforts have failed in the past because the main players are apparently never sufficiently clean to withstand serious initiatives. Newspapers role-play in curbing corruption can be extremely valuable but journalists in Nigeria are seemingly clogged by their vulnerability to corruption, and are vitiated not only by these inadequacies but also by ethnic, religious and political influences. Hence, in the presence of much corruption, the press may be deliberately constrained from acting in its role as a deterrent of corruption.

To fight corruption successfully, the journalists must first cultivate professional integrity and responsibility, and purge themselves of prejudices and corruption. Responsibility is freedom and the capacity to choose alternative action. Professional integrity comes with deep loyalty to truth. The conduct of journalists is influenced by psychological, biological, socio-economic and political factors but their ability to control these influences is a mark of true freedom. Until Nigerian journalists assert their freedom and independence from unwholesome influences can they ever be committed to truth which is the basis for journalism practice. But if Nigerian journalists continue to be driven by greed and ego to accepting favours from the rich and powerful, they shall never maintain clean hands nor live above suspicion in everything they do, and their good sense and thinking shall ever be muddied by corruption hence they can never be successful in making government accountable to the people.

Nigerian journalists must also rise above ethnic, political and religious cleavages in our society or what Mabogunje, (2001) calls the 'two public syndrome' to fight corruption successfully. Obligation to the ethnic community in Nigeria is strong, tends undermine the national system and is a strong contributing factor for the pervasive corruption in the country. But deep loyalty to truth and commitment to the common good can strengthen the capacity of journalists in exposing systematic abuses.

Corruption thrives in secrecy. The fair presumption is that secrecy means impropriety. Nigeria is largely a closed society with low level of openness and official secrecy remains the basis for grand corruption. Freely accessible information pertaining to government activities is therefore necessary to ensure accountability of government officials. The Freedom of Access to Information Act (FOIA) was signed into law in May 2011 but it is not doubtful that the Nigeria's freedom of information act lacks in its provisions, is fraught with inconsistencies and regrettably, contains little to assuage the yearnings of Nigerians for information accessibility and needs legislative rethink to bring it in tandem with developed democracies of the world (Mmadu, 2011). Certainly, only by proactive use can its potency against the corrupt leadership in Nigeria step up investigative reporting to curb corruption.

The Nigerian Constitution qualifies and curtails freedom of expression and of the press with Sections 39 and 45. Ongoing constitutional reforms must accord the Nigerian press the kind of status accorded American press by US First Amendment which says "Congress shall make no law abridging freedom of expression and of the press". Sub-section two of Section 39 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 arguably conflicts itself particularly on ownership of the broadcast media. Indeed, the right to freedom of expression and the press

can be unreasonably restricted and abrogated by arbitrary laws as justified in the latter part of 39(2), 39(3) and Section 45. But the media can play a positive role in democracy only if there is an enabling environment that allows them to do so. Journalists therefore need to be protected by laws that guarantee their rights. For according to Brunetti and Weder (2003), there seems to be a strong link between the level of press freedom and the amount of corruption in different countries where more press freedom indicated less corruption and a high degree of press freedom appeared to serve as a strong deterrent to corruption.

More importantly, anti-corruption agencies - ICPC and EFCC - must be allowed to monitor budgetary allocations to government departments and ministries on specific development projects. This can help track movement of funds from public coffers and check diversions to private pockets. The current situation where ICPC, for instance, relies on public officials to report acts of bribery and corruption is impracticable. For one, public officials as accessories after the fact of corruption are vulnerable and can never report corruption within their circles. Besides, reporting corruption exposes them to personal risks. Secondly, the corrupting influence and power of corrupt officials above them is overwhelming. Junior officials acquiesce and compromise easily and this condition weakens ICPC whose power of prosecution relies on public officers to report corrupt acts. Hence ICPC should be legally mandated to monitor and track government budgetary allocations and expenditures.

All these measures would remain unproductive where the leadership lacks the political will, credibility and integrity to fight corruption. To fight corruption successfully, our leaders must remain sufficiently clean since enough evidence shows that those who wield government authority are at the heart of corruption in Nigeria. The leadership must show sincerity of purpose and political will in this fight against corruption.

Much of the research on the media and corruption has always centred on roles media play in curbing corruption. More research efforts need be directed at how the media had actually been performing these roles and with degree of success especially in corruption prone countries like Nigeria.

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