

The Role of Public Administration in the Federal Government War against Corruption in Nigeria

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Abstract

Corruption is a hydra-headed cancer that has eaten deep into the fabric of every social life of Nigeria. Corruption is more pronounced in the Nigerian Public service than any other sector of the country. This paper seeks to establish the role of public administration in the Federal Government War Against Corruption in the country. Secondary data, gathered through document observation, are used for the analysis of this paper, Political Economy approach, based on the Marxian concept of the dialectical materialism of the society, was adopted as a frame work of analysis. It is observed that over 70 percent of corrupt practices in Nigeria occur in the public sector. The inherited colonial bureaucracy is thwarted by an avalanche of social, economic, cultural, legal and administrative bottlenecks which should be overhauled for the Nigerian Public Administration to successfully prosecute war against corruption in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Corruption is a canker-worm that has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigerian society. It is one of the greatest problems confronting Nigeria as she strives to emerge as one of the strongest 20 economies by 2020.

Corruption has become so deep seated in the country that it has started growth in all sectors and has been the primary reason behind the country's difficulties in developing fats (Nigeria-Planet, 2011) Transparency International, an independent global watch on corruption, ranks Nigeria among the five most corrupt nations in the world, an ignominious record that has stunted growth in all areas of endeavour in the country (Nigeria-Planet com, 2011).

Corruption has been part of Nigeria, as it is seen as global phenomenon that cuts across ethnic, religious, political and economic divide. However, corruption assumed pandemic status in Nigeria since political independence in 1960. The post independent government quest for nation building and the consequent euphoria to enthrone democratic principles, massive provision of basic infrastructure and the desire to fast track national development fired and nurtured the seed of corruption in Nigeria.

The task of nation-building involves mobilization of people for active participation in the socio-economic and political activities of the state. Regrettably, however, corruption has whittled down these efforts, as every fabric of the country is deeply engulfed by this malady (Nwekeaku, 2010).

Successive Nigerian regimes have made frantic efforts to combat corruption in the society, especially in the public sector. These efforts gained currency since 1975, when the Murtala/Obasanjo regime waged relentless battle against corrupt practices in the public services.

The Obasanjo regime (1999-2003) witnessed relentless war against corruption in the country, as it activated the existing anti-graft agencies, as well as built new ones. The Independent Corrupt Practices and other Offences Commission, ICPC, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, the Due Process office, among others, have been waging battle against corrupt has continued to assume new dimension with each passing day in Nigeria.

Over 80 percent of high ranking public officers in Nigeria are said to be corrupt. Both former and serving state government, ministers, legislators, and other categories of public servants wallow in corrupt practices. Hon. Dimeji Bankole, the immediate past speaker of the House of Representatives and number four citizen of this country is still standing trial over N10 billion scandal at the National Assembly. Dr. Lawal, a Minister of labour and later works, is standing trial for alleged N50 billion misappropriation.

The US Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton captured the consequences of corruption on national development when she told a respectable audience in Abuja that a culture of corruption and incompetence had hobbled Nigeria's ability to develop as an economic power and benefits her deprived citizens (Clinton, 2009). She observed that lack of transparency and accountability had eroded the credibility of the government and contributed to the rise of groups that have embraced violence and rejected the authority of the state at the federal, state and local levels. Mrs. Clinton noted that the recent World Bank report, which indicated that Nigeria had lost over \$30 billion to contribution and mismanagement over the past three decades, was a monumental waste that could have been harnessed for Nigeria's entry into the G-20 nations, thus providing a voice in global economic and political decision making.

The Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Chief Anyim P. Anyim, shared Mrs. Clinton's view implementation of the United Nations Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) 2009 enabled Nigeria to

take a critical look at the anti-corruption agenda and identify gaps and challenges.

Similarly, Gosztanyi, et al (2009) have observed that despite Nigeria's size, and the energy and talents of her people, she has failed to achieve her full potentials because of poor leadership, poor infrastructure and a history of high levels of corruption. They noted that the Nigerian market had long been notorious for graft, partly as a result of the country's reputation as the world leader in financial crime, as well as the systematic abuse of the oil wealth over several decades by the political class. Consequently, they argued, many leading investors that might otherwise flocked the country stayed away.

In 2000, a Swiss banking commission's report indicted the Swiss Banks for failure to follow compliance process in allowing family and friends of the Abacha access to accounts and deposits amounting to \$600 million US dollars. The same year, a total of more than \$1 billion US dollars were found in various accounts through Europe (Wikipedia). The 1996 study of corruption by the Transparency International and Geottingen University ranked Nigeria as the most corrupt nation among 54 countries listed in the study with Parkistan as the second highest (More, 1997) similarly, the Transparency International corrupt index (CPI) of 85 countries in 1998 ranked Nigeria 81 (Lipset and Lenz, 2000) worse still, the 2001 corruption perception Index (CPI) saw Nigeria further down, as she ranked 90 out of 91 countries pooled, and second position as the most corrupt country, within Bangladesh coming first. Generally, Nigeria is seen as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, and this poses a great challenge to her public administration.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theory provides the general road map on which research problems are interpreted, measured, analyzed and predicted. The Political Economy approach, based on the Marxian concept of the dialectical materialism of the society has been adopted as a framework of analysis for this paper. Three elements are central to this political Economy approach, namely, the centrality of the material conditions of the society, the dynamic character of the social reality and the relatedness and complex nature of the elements of the society. The economic activity of man forms the basis for his social relations in the society. To provide his basic needs man interacts with the other members of the society. The mode of production comprises the productivity forces and the social relations of production. Productive forces comprises men, the objects of product and the instruments of labour when associated in the production process.

The people's relation in the production process are influence by the character of the ownership of the means of production, their role in the production process, the position they occupy, the exchange activities among them, as well as the distribution pattern of their output the economic structure is the pivot on which the superstructure revolves. The main features of the social realities are motion and dynamism propelled by contractions inherent in its related and complex elements, including the struggle among the social classes. The material foundation of Nigeria determines the character of her superstructure, including social-political, bureaucracy, religion, and the gamut of the social systems, including corruption, prostitution, violence, fraud and other vices which are mere expressions of the contradictions among social classes that are in constant struggle in the product process.

What is Corruption?

Much has been written on corruption as the concept has gained currency in the lexicon of social life of our society today. Nye (1967) defines corruption as a behaviour, which deviates from the formal duties of a public role, because of private gains regarding personal, close family, private clique pecuniary or status gains.

In a similar vein, Khan (1996) sees corruption as an act which deviates significantly from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of some one in a position of public authority because of the ulterior motives, such as wealth, power or status. Under this circumstance the person perverts the rule governing the organization for personal gain.

Sharing the views of Nye and Khan, Lipset and Lenz (2000:112 – 144) define corruption as the effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means for private gains at the expense of the public. Corruption, here is a misuse or misapplication of public office or power for personal benefits. Seen (1999:275) concerns the above views when he defined corruption as a perversion or a change from good to bad, which involves the violation of established rules for personal gains and profit.

In a similar vein, the World Bank, cited in Gidado (2001:4) sees corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain, which involves seeking promise or receipt of a gift or any other advantage by a public servant in consideration for performance or omission of an act in clear violation of duties required of the office.

In a radical slant, Osoba (1996) sees corruption as an anti-social behaviour, which confers improper benefits to the perpetrator, contrary to legal and normal norms, and which undermine the authorities to improve the living conditions of the people.

For the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), (2000) corruption is anything already done or omitted to be done, or any favour or disfavour already shown to any person, by a public officer in the

discharge of his official or in relation to any matter connected with the functions, affairs or business of a government department, public body or other organization or institution in which the public officer is serving as such. Here, corruption is seen in a broader context, though restricted to public office.

For the purpose of this paper, corruption is the gamut of behaviour or conducts, public or private, which are anti-social and clear pervasion of established norms or rules as well as being motivated and sustained by personal gains at the expense of the public or the victim(s).

Causes and effects of corruption

Writing on corruption in Nigeria, Wikipedia (2011) states that the rise of public administration and the discovering of oil and natural gas are the two major events seen to have led to a litany of ignoble corrupt practices in the country. It further notes that the trappings of flash cars, houses and success of the colonialists may have influenced the poor to see the colonialists as symbols of success worthy of emulation in different political ways.

In a similar vein, the Nigeria-planet (2011) notes that more money was made from oil in one year than had ever been made from agro-based sources for several years. In a bid to harness the new wealth to leverage infrastructures – roads, bridges, Airports etc huge contracts were awarded without regard for normal processes. Government spent money without much control, paving the way for corruption to take hold. Ever since it has spiraled out of control, the Nigeria planet concludes.

Ndulor (1999) believes that corruption is caused by many factors, which include obsession with materialist compulsion for a shortcut to affluence, glorification and appropriation of ill-gotten wealth by the general public. Earlier Bryce (1921) had stated that corruption was caused by great inequality in the distribution of wealth; political office as the primary means of gaining access to wealth, conflict between changing moral codes; the weaknesses of social and government enforcement mechanism; and the absence of a strong sense of national community.

The workshop for the civil society organizations identified the following factors as the major causes of corruption in Nigeria: weak government institutions, poor pay incentives, lack of openness and transparency in public service, absence of key corruption tools; in effective political process; culture and acceptance of corruption by the populace; absence of effective political financing, poverty, ethnic and political differences; and resource scramble (Babalobi, 2008).

Clinton (2009) has noted that lack of transparency and accountability of government imparted negatively on the legitimacy of the government and contributed to the rise of the groups that embrace violence and rejected the authority of the state.

Maure (1997) argues that corruption impacts negatively on the economic development of a country, as it slows down economic growth, reduces public spending on education, investment and other social amenities, as well as increases the cost of public projects. Corruption, he further notes, forces government to invest and spend on white elephant projects rather than areas of need first for graft.

In a similar vein (Dike, 2008) observes that corruption upsets ethnic balance and exacerbates problems of national integration in developing countries. specially Dike (2008) notes that corruption leads to slow movement of flies in offices, police extortion at tollgates (road blocks) and slow traffic on the highways, port congestion, ques at passport offices and gas stations, ghost workers syndrome, election irregularities, among others.

Corruption is a cog in the wheel of public administration in Nigeria, as it impacts negatively on the gamut of public service at all levels of governance in this country.

What is Public Administration?

The concept “Public Administration” is as old as government per se. since the era of the state of nature when men came together and resolved to surrender their rights for the preservation of life and property under a social contract to the modern state with a government based on laws, public administration has become a popular concept.

According to Starling (1977) public administration concerns the accomplishing side of government, which comprises all those activities involved in carrying out the policies of elected officials and activities with the development of those policies.

Similarity, Gordon (1978) sees public administration as all processes, organizations and individuals (the leader acting in official positions and roles) associated with carrying out laws and other rules adopted or issued by legislatures executives and courts. Earlier, Stein (1952) sees public administration as a field in which every man in his own codifier and categorizer and the categories adopted must be looked on a relatively evanescent.

In a broader perspective, public administration:

Is a cooperative group effort in a public setting;

Covers all the three branches of government executive, legislative and judicial-and their interpretations;
Has an important role in the formulation of public policy, and is thus part of the political process; is different in significant ways from private administration; and is closely associated with numerous private groups and individuals in providing services to the community.

Generally, public administration is the gamut of policies, programmes, activities, projects and strategies of government and its agencies designed and implemented for the public good and services based on some historically defined bureaucratic principles and laws. It encompasses the activities and functions of the three organs of government and their principal agencies and commissions.

Public Administration and government War Against Corruption in Nigeria.

One of the major challenges that has faced Nigeria over the years is the issue of corruption and its deliberating ancillaries, namely, bribery, graft, fraud and nepotism (Nigeria-Planet, 2011). Since political independence on October 1960 successive regimes have waged serious battle against corruption and its ancillaries, which have painted Nigeria black and diminished her image before the community of nations.

Corruption was a major contributory factor to the 1975 public service purge in Nigeria in which over 10,000 public servants were dismissed. Characterizing corruption in Nigeria, Dike (2011) notes that it occurs at the political, bureaucratic and electoral levels, but observes that bureaucratic corruption occurs in the public administration or the implementation end.

A roll call of major corrupt scandals in Nigeria include:

- The 1944 African Continental Bank, ACB, Saga in which Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe's family was alleged to have acquired major shares of the bank with the resources of the Eastern Region Financial Corporation.
- The Adegoke Adelabu financial scandal in which Adelabi was accused of political corruption.
- The 1975 cement importation scandal against the Gowon administration.
- The 1981 rice importation scandal and mysterious fire incidents that gutted some government homes.
- The \$12.4 billion naira gulf windfall which Babangida administration could not account for.
- The gas plant contract award scandal at which a French firm was alleged to have given over \$100 million bribe to some powerful Nigerians under the Abacha regime.
- The 2000 Swiss banking commission report which indicted some Swiss banks for compromising with the late Sani Abacha's family to have access to over \$600 million.
- The unaccounted N300 billion purportedly spent on road projects by Ministry of Works under Tony Anini leadership.
- The Patricia Etteh (Former Speaker of the House of Representatives) contract scandal.
- The Dimeji Bankole (immediate past Speaker) N50 billion financial Scandal.
- Legion of corruption practices preferred against some former governors, legislators, ministers and other public officers.

In order to successively prosecute the corruption practices in Nigeria, the Federal Government has set-up different agencies over time for this purpose. These agencies include:

- The code of Conduct Bureau
- The Independent Corruption Practices Commission, ICPC
- The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
- The Due Process Office.

Government has also made several laws, decrees and edicts, including the latest Freedom of Information Act, all geared towards facilitating war against corruption in Nigeria. All these anti-graft agencies, laws and regulations operate within the ambit of public administration.

Despite these efforts Babalobi (2008) has noted that the war against corruption in Nigeria has failed because of the insincerity of the government and lack of the political will to combat this hydra-headed evil.

A corruption study of public institutions on Nigeria found that the following institutions were perceived as the most corrupt: Nigeria police, political parties, national and state assemblies, local and municipal governments, federal and state executive councils, traffic police and FRSC and PHCN in that order (Final Report, June 2003).

It is, therefore, a welcome relief when the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Chief Anyim P. Anyim said that the government had resolved to increase the tempo of war against corruption in the country. He stated that a self assessment of the country's implementation of the United Nations Convention Against corruption, (UNCAC) 2009 revealed some gaps and challenges, hence a decision by the inter-Agency Task

Team of anti-corruption agencies (IATT) to develop a holistic nations strategy to combat corruption.

Analysis of Public Administration on Corruption

Public administration, according to Karl Marx, is a bridge between the state and the civil society. The civil society comprises various professional bodies, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, NGOs, among other pressure groups that make demands on the system. Bureaucracy, says Marx, is the medium through which these interest groups interact actively with the state, which also represents the general interest of the society (Nwekeaku, 2010).

Since the material foundation or the economic sub-structure is the pivot on which the super structures, including bureaucracy, revolve, those who control the economic equally control the political, bureaucratic and other structures.

Marx has argued that since bureaucracy is intricately linked with the interest of the dominant class, it (bureaucracy) is an instrument of class oppression, intimidation, exploitation and suppression. He accuses the bureaucrats of self-aggrandizement, sordid materialism, internal struggle and wrangling for promotion, careerism status symbols and corruption.

Marx views of bureaucracy aptly capture the fate of public administration in the war against corruption in Nigeria. Since the tacit conspiracy of the political class and the bureaucrats to loot public treasury remains unbroken, the Federal Government war against corruption in Nigeria will remain tangential and cosmetics. A thief does not catch a fellow thief. The ruling class, including the economic and political class, controls bureaucracy, and determines the extent of its operational efficiency. The anti-graft agencies are at the mercy of the ruling class. This dilemma explains the shameful removal of Mallam Nuhu Ribadu as the chairman of EFCC and his subsees went demotion and humiliation by a political cabal.

The EFCC, ICPC, Code of Conduct Bureau, among other agencies and institutions will continue to bark without biting corruption in Nigeria because they can never harm their paid masters nor jeopardize their economic interests.

Conclusion

Corruption is a terrible cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigeria. It is perpetrated and sustained by the ruling class, who controls bureaucracy and other anti-graft agencies in the country. Bureaucracy promotes and protects the interest of the ruling class, and cannot effect any fundamental change.

Equitably redistribution of resources in the country, a drastic overhaul of bureaucracy, a review of some capitalist and exploitative policies, such as, privatization, liberalization, commercialization, monetization, enhanced welfare package for workers, provision of basic social amenities, among others, will revolutionalise the bureaucracy and improves the public administration war against corruption in Nigeria.

A just, fair and equitable society, based on good governance, the rule of law and democracy will produce a vibrant and pungent bureaucracy capable of eradicating corruption in Nigeria. It is then that the Nigerian Public will be on a mission to fight corruption in the country.

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