

# Corruption and Development in Nigeria: A Critical Re-Examination

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## Abstract

This paper sets out to examine the effects of corruption on the overall development of Nigeria with emphasis on the argument that Nigeria as a country is blessed with both human and natural resources but due to corruption, particularly, public corruption, the misuse of public office for private gain, Nigerian society has experienced abject poverty and underdevelopment. Using historical and content analysis, relevant data were derived from the review of relevant literature. Relying on the political economy approach, the paper traced the problem of corruption to colonialism which persisted even after independence. Among other thing, the paper reveal that the Nigerian society is and looting of public property, lack of transparency and accountability among the ruling class. Among other suggestion, the paper recommends, de-emphasizing wealth and shunning those individual who have enriched themselves with stolen public money instead of worshipping them.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Development, Transparency, Accountability and Re-Examination

## Introduction

The history of corruption is as old as the world, because ancient civilization, have traces of widespread, illegality and corruption. Thus corruption is also believed to be endemic in modern government and it is not peculiar to any continent, region, country or ethnic group. This does however mean that the incidence and magnitude of corrupt activities are the same in every society. Some countries are obviously more corrupt than others, while some have been able to properly manage the problem of corruption, despite its unending crusade against corruption. Corruption has become a household word in many societies particularly, Nigeria. However, the concept of corruption varies across communities and individuals. Corruption involves a lot of thing, such as the misuse of public office for private gain, giving bribes to influence decisions or to make people to do thing hat are morally wrong etc. corruption in public office is usually called public corruption. This involves a government official benefiting at the expenses of tax-payer who require that government resources be use for development, which will ensure good life foe the people. In this paper, we shall be concern with the corruption that takes place in the public domain or government.

## Statement of Problem

Corruption is very costly to the society. Even if an individual does not come directly with corruption, it affects every individual in society. Corruption, as it is now in Nigeria reduces the overall wealth in the country since it discourages business from operating in such a corrupt setting. Although, the impetus of this paper derived from the practical problem of underdevelopment arising from corruption of accounting for the growing spree of corruption in public domain forms the research problem. In specific terms, what agitate the mind of the researcher is to examine and create deeper understanding of the reason for the impetus for low level of appreciation of the negative effects of corruption on development; by the elites who engage in corruption. Most importantly, it agitates our mind that inspite of numerous anti-corruption institution setup to help curb the incidences of corruption, the problem of corruption has not abated. Thus, the paper examines, discovers and possibly recommends possible solution to the problem of corruption in Nigeria.

## Objectives of Study

The study specially seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- i. To identify the character and dimension of public corruption and its effect on development in Nigeria.
- ii. To account for the possible reasons why efforts at combating corruption in Nigeria have not yielded substantial results.
- iii. The study also hopes to enables generalization, prediction and possible theorizing about the effect of corruption on development in Nigeria.

## Significance of Study

This work is significant in many respects, which may include the following:

- i. It hopes express a deeper understanding of causes of corruption and its effect on national development in Nigeria.
- ii. It will help to develop a theory to explain the prevalence of corruption in the public domain.
- iii. It helps to contribute to the body of existing knowledge on the generic concepts of corruption and

development in Nigeria.

### Conceptual Clarification

**Corruption:** The concept of corruption has been credited as a hydra-headed monster, which permeated all facets of the Nigeria society. It is perceived as the orchestrated intention of satisfying personal and selfish intentions and purpose in the discharge of ones statutory responsibilities against established and accepted rules, regulations, norms and ethics (**Oromarrghake,2007: 115**). Corruption has broadly been defines perversion or change from good to bad. Specifically, corruption involves the violation of established rules for personal gains and profit. According to he advanced Oxford English Learner’s Dictionary, corruption means, “dishonest or illegal behavior, especially of people in authority”. Corruption is a behavior which deviates from the normal duties of a public role, because of personal or private gain; this definition includes such behaviors bribery, use of reward to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust, nepotism and misappropriation, illegal appropriation of public resources for private uses. Corruption can take any form of wrongdoing or behavior, act of violation of public norm or deviation from honesty. Corruption of the macro level represents all the selfish and selfish activities and behavior of men at the helm of societal affairs, governance and governmental agencies and institution against established norms, ethics, rules and regulations. This cuts the Legislative, Executive and Judiciary at the various level of government Nigeria.

### Development

The concept of development is very contentious as the word means different things to different scholars. Some scholars view development in term of technical artifacts physical structures, while other view it in term of social development which encompasses economic, political, cultural and ideological aspects.

(**Nnoli, 1980:163**). It is the argument of (**Toyo, 2001: 23-51**) that development should not just be change of thing but progressive and positive change in the lives of the people. **Seer (1969:30)** calls attention to the core issues. In underdevelopment, poverty, unemployment and inequality. These questions occupy the centre stage in his definition of development thus;

*The question to ask about a country’s development, are therefore: what has happened to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What happening to Inequality? If all three of these have declined from high level, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country or society concerned. If one or two of these central problem have been growing worse, especially, if all three have it would be strange to call the result development even if the per-capita income doubled (Seer1969: 30)*

**Todaro (1985:85)** conceives of development on a holistic basis, as encompassing all aspects of a nation’s life; when he assert that development must therefore be seen as a multi-dimensional process involving change in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions, as well as acceleration of economic growth. Development in its essence must represent the whole gamut of changes by which an entire social system, tuned to the diverse basic needs and desires of individual and social groups within that system move away from a condition widely perceived as unsatisfactory and toward a situation of life regarded as materially and spiritually better. From what has been said about development above by different writers, it is clear that attempting a satisfactory definition of development is not an easy task. Development can be said, in line with Todaro as having many dimensions which include economic, political, social, cultural, religious and even personal. This is why it might be right to argue that the theory of development can be likened to the theory of life. We can therefore, defined development as advancement which makes life more meaningful in all its ramifications. This form of development can hardly, be achieved in society like Nigeria where resources meant for development are expropriated by the stronger in the society.

### Corruption and the Capitalistic Colonial Heritage

To properly articulate the problem of corruption in Nigeria, it has to be situated within socio- political economy of the nation. Nigeria as we known is a product of colonial birth. Colonialism exposed Nigeria to the capitalist system of the west. The history of corruption in Nigeria, could be traced back the inception of self-governance in the country. Soon after the exit of the colonial rulers from the political arena of Nigeria, the elite class stepped into their political shoes, began to use their political power and position to advance personal parochial interest. The result was cut –throat competition for power and share of the so called national cake. In their competition for supremacy these leader needed to give out endless material to reward to their supporter in order to gain relevance. It became extremely difficult for the political leader to service the numerous demands of their supporters. He naturally requires toinvent extra-means of remaining relevant in power. This was why they had to resort to stealing public funds (**Olumese, 2004:5**) in a capitalist system; wealth is the measures for the all

things. Nigeria in a dependent or an undeveloped capitalist system. Hence in Nigeria, some individual who acquired their wealth through illegal means such as stealing government money instead of being shunned and disgraced by the public, are accorded respect and even worshipped by the society (**Ozo-Ezon 2007; 156**). Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has experienced very bad government both military and civilian. Corruption has continued to constitute an obstacle to the achievement of national development. The wealth of the nation concentrated in the hands of few individuals. The worker are paid wages 'not enough to take them home' and this has led to frequent strikes among many public organizations. Further, many Nigerians go for month without their salaries being paid (ibid). After 48 year of impence, life in Nigeria is now more hostile. There is hunger, unemployment including graduate unemployed, social facilities of education, health etc are in doldrums. The various programmes/policies instituted in Nigeria after independence to alleviate poverty and create socio-economic development failed due to corruption in Nigeria. (**Adegboruwa, 2006:10**) argues that the highly trumpeted reforms have nothing to do with the ordinary Nigerians but, benefiting the few bourgeois class in power and their associates

### **The Effect of Corruption On Development**

The concept of development is very contentious as the word means different thing to different scholars Development should involve qualitative and quantitative charge in socio-economic process, which improves the quality and standard of living of the people. It involves providing qualitative and formal education to the people to develop their minds and liberate them. It is obvious that Nigerian leader are able to manipulate the masses because of the vast illiteracy level in the country. However, increasingly, all over the world, the effects of corruption on the society is being discussed as a major obstacle to the development of society particularly third world countries. In Nigeria, many scholars are beginning to associate corruption to the abject poverty of most Nigerians. For instances, (**Gani 2006:77**) argued that with corruption the people are denied employment, good education, water, electricity, housing, good health and sound infrastructure. He opines the since independence, Nigeria had the misfortune of having bad leader and governments. That, the abundance resources of the nation are not utilized for the benefits of them. The ruling class, divert funds meant for the welfare and development of their people to their private coffers, such fraudulent practice has impoverished Nigerians. Similarly, the immediate past Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, at the inauguration of the new public-Civil Society Coalition against corruption in Abuja, gave a gory picture of how Nigerian leader cripples the state by stealing money meant for developing the nation; and that the stolen money was much more than what was invested in rebuilding Europe after the second world war through the Marshal plan (**Amaefule and Owete 2000:32**). Apart from financial losses, the image of Nigeria is indicted all over the world. The former information Minister, Nweke Jnr gave an account of the embarrassing search he made to go through when he travelled outside the country, just because he was carrying a Nigerian passport. Because of this bad image of Nigeria, foreign investors are also afraid to come to invest in Nigeria business environment. In specific terms, we have identified the following impart of corruption on basic principles for societal development.

- i. The legitimacy of the State/institution as Guardian of public Interest is contested:
- ii. In highly corrupt countries like Nigeria, there is little public acceptance of the notion that the role of the state, its institution and agencies is to arise above private interest to protect the broader public interest. Public office holder focusing on serving particular client group linked to them by ethnic, geographic or other ties-shapes the public landscape, creates condition ripe for corruption.
- iii. Rule of law is weakly Embedded: Public corruption in Nigeria thrives because the laws apply to some especially, the poor and those, outside government circle and not to the rich and those within government circle. In other words, corruption has weakened the enforcement of the law as contained in the constitution. The law is often used as a device for furthering private interests rather than protecting the public interest. A common breakdown of rule of law in Nigeria caused by corruption is the police acting as law breakers rather than law enforcers. For example, stopping motorists for invented traffic violation as excuse for extracting bribes. Also, the independence of the judiciary is being compromised in Nigeria as a result of corruption.
- iv. Corruption in Nigeria Weakens the Commitment of National Leader Combating it.
- v. Wide spread corruption endures in the public sector when national authorities are either unwilling or unable to address it forcefully. In societies such as Nigeria, where public sector corruption is epidemic, it is reasonable to suspect that it touches the highest levels of government and that many senior office holders will not be motivated to work against it (Shah, 2004:10-14).
- vi. Corruption gives rise to low efficiency in productivity; poor quality of services, it generated low morals, ugly personality and image; it leads to manipulation/rigging of electing; employment of mediocre and non competent hands; it leads to abandonment of social infrastructure and bad cultural orientation. It stunts the growth and development of the state, individuals and democracy.

### Attempts at Curbing the Problem of Corruption in Nigeria

Corruption has become the norm of the society to the extent that those few individual who try to hold on to their integrity and moral values of society, are usually looked upon as abnormal persons. Corruption as we argued earlier can be traced to the colonial era. The colonial government deliberately instituted the “divide and rule” system which has remained even after independence. However various governments in Nigeria have tried to address the problem of corruption. Under General Gowon’s regime, the slogan was that Nigeria was a very rich country and that” the problem with Nigeria is not money but how spend the money”. Of course this led to reckless spending of Nigeria money and resources without adequate planning and management for the future. The problem of corruption was totally ignored and not brought for public discussion let alone doing something about it. Any attempt to conceive of corruption as a problem during General Gowon’s regime was suppresses by all means (Zoaka, 2004:16). An attempt was also made to address the problem of corruption during General Murtala/Obasanjo regime. This regime was determined not to condone corruption but to fight against misappropriation of public funds both in the state and the federal levels. This zeal led to the retirement and dismissal of thousand of civil servant, many came back and still holding key position in the public sector (Zoaka, 2004:16). Considering the shame and embarrassment corruption has brought to this nation, both at the national and international level, the then Obasanjo/Atiku’ government has put certain organs in place to check corruption in Nigeria which is yielding some fruits, even though, the administration has been accused of chasing corruption selectively. Some of these organizations include, The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Independence Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC), the National Agency For Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), other are the Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON) that makes sure that the material used for manufacturing in Nigeria measure up to standard. In Nigeria, leadership has become synonymous with corruption, a license to loot tax-payer’ money and get away scot free, particularly with the immunity clause that is granted some of the ruling class like the president, vice president, governors are facing trial as charged by the EFCC. NAFDAC has helped in no small measure in saving the lives if Nigerian by scrutinizing food of this nation, making sure that manufacturer maintain standards. Many manufacturers were guilty of producing goods without licenses, thus giving people poison. For instance, Onitsha main market, chalk was sold for drugs and ordinary water for drip, which resulted in many deaths. But for NAFDAC, thing would have been worst for Nigerian. All these acts are attempt by Nigeria by corruptively enrich themselves irrespectively of the cost of human health.

### Summary and Conclusion

The Nigerian society is in state of normlessness. Laws are arrogantly disobeyed by the ruling class and the masses are not left out of the problem. The problem of corruption involves both highly and lowly placed in society. From the often attendant who hides peoples files until he/she is given something to boss who uses his/her position to steal and loot what belongs to the people. In Nigeria, all that social institutions are influenced by corruption. The result of corruption is nothing but underdevelopment. The focus of this paper therefore, has try to present issue of corruption as it affects national development adversely. From our discussion, we have been able to bring the problem to the awareness of fellow scholars by which we expect further discussion. We strongly believe that if Nigerian society could be rid of corruption, the problem of poverty would be greatly reduced if not completed eradicated. Trillions of Naira has been stolen by few Nigerians and we greatly believed that such money could have greatly been put into providing the socio-economic needs of the people and by extension ensuring development of the country. However, we make the following recommendations:

- ❖ The society should endeavour to shun leaders and individuals identified to have stolen public money thus creating abject poverty; instead of worshipping them for their ill gotten wealth.
- ❖ Politics should be seen as a way for an individual to make his/her contribution to the development of society instead of an avenue to loot public funds.
- ❖ Good moral in society should be taught and appreciated right from nursery through primary, secondary schools, to university level instead of emphasizing money and corrupt tendencies.
- ❖ The problem of inequality should be addressed to reduce it to a natural level where those who work hard can achieve success substantially

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