

CORRUPTION AND LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES IN A DEMOCRACY: A CASE OF NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Democracy envisions transparency and accountability in governance. The experience under the current democratic dispensation however appears to be contrary to the virtues promised by democracy. Corruption has assumed notorious dimensions and has become a drag on the development of the country. Corruption is not a recent development in Nigeria. It has been with us over the years, and like a cancer, it has continued to spread to every part of the nation's structure. Since corruption became a noticeable national malaise. Every government, military or civilian, had staged one kind of battle other against it. Nevertheless, corruption has escalated rather than abate. The paper probes the nexus between corruption, democracy and development in Nigeria. The rampaging scourge of corruption is blamed on poor leadership which is largely a product of distorted democratic process through election rigging. The paper concludes that corruption has been a clog on the path of progress and development. And that the country can only develop if the political leadership would demonstrate genuine concern to obliterate the menace.

Key Words: Democracy, Leadership and Accountable.

INTRODUCTION:

Nigeria is one of the most endowed nations in the world. A human and material resource with which the country is blessed probably qualifies it to be ranked among the highly developed nations of the world. The abundance of vital minerals deposit in virtually all the state of the federation is not in doubt. Valuable minerals such as crude oil, gold, bitumen, uranium, gypsum, tin, iron ore, limestone underlay the country landscape with valuable cash crops like cocoa, coffee, timber, rubber, oil palm forming good portion of its vegetation. Animal husbandry and aquatic farming thrive in the country in a commercial measure. Yet, the country occupies a conspicuous position among the under developed nations of the world. Nigeria, once the “giant of Africa” now severely economically bankrupt consequent upon the incidence of massive plundering of the economy. The country which was one of the richest 50 countries in the early

1970s has retrogressed to become one of the 25 poorest countries at the threshold of the 21st century.

It is an irony that Nigeria is one of the 6th largest exporters of oil and at the same time hosts the 3rd largest number of poor people after China and India (Akanle, 2010). The average annual percentage growth of GDP in Nigeria from 1990 – 2000 was 2.4. this is rather poor when compared to Ghana (4.3) and Egypt (4.6).

Nigeria still deals with corruption in its political and legal systems, and is an ever – growing problems for the country going by the shocking revelations at the House of Representative Panel on the deregulation of oil subsidy.

The Nigeria economy has failed to keep pace with rapid growth in population, increasing expectations and the development of performance. Investment and development economists argued that corruption has been the major factor hindering investment influx and development in Nigeria. The World Bank estimated a leakage of about \$400 billion from the nations' oil resources (Akinaso, 2011). Rev. Father Kukah (1999) observed that “no single issue perhaps, caused much popular revulsion and anger as corruption”. Ajibewa (2006) argued that Gen. Sani Abacha, for instance is reputed to have siphoned off \$4 billion from the state coffers during his five years in power. Economic prosperity of the citizens is one of the pivotal correlates of a virile democracy. In a situation whereby the wealth of the country is siphoned for personal interest the incidence of infrastructure decay coupled with poor standard of living of people become unavoidable.

CONCEPTUALIZING CORRUPTION; LEADERSHIP AND DEMOCRACY:

It is a universal phenomenon which has been with virtually all kinds of societies throughout history as a global crime. It features in various forms and dimensions depending on where it is found. Consequent upon its universality, the concept attracts different meanings from different people. For instance, Odekunle (1986) described corruption as any transaction which violates the duty of public office holder with a partial motive of acquiring or amassing resources illegally for personal advancement and self-gratification. It can therefore be inferred that corruption implies perversion of public affairs for private advantage.

Corruption is not a recent development in Nigeria. Since the time when it became a noticeable national malaise, every government, military or civilian, had staged one kind of battle or the other against it. Nevertheless, corruption has been on an increase rather than abate. Disappearance of billions of naira from the coffers of the Federal, State and Local Governments and various governmental institutions, including the Universal Basic Education, Nomadic Education, Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, Petroleum Technology Development Fund, and Pension Fund among others is now a common place. Money invested overseas by government, such as foreign reserves and excess crude account is routinely depleted with nothing to show for it.

The concept connotes the set of characteristics that makes a good leader. The leadership capability is manifested in many ways: maintaining order without relying on the excessive use of violence, guaranteeing the citizens the basic securities of life and property, expanding the supply of fundamental public goods such as transportation, healthcare, housing and educational system; facilitating the emergence of a civic order that transcends parochial identities; and establishing a system of laws required for economic growth and development.

The term democracy comes from the Greek language and means 'rule by the people'. The so – called 'democracies' in classical antiquity (Athens and Rome) represent precursors of modern democracies. Like modern democracy, they were created as a reaction to a concentration and abuse of power by the rulers. Yet the theory of modern democracy was not formulated until the Age of Enlightens (17th/18th centuries).

Aristotle defines it in its purest form as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. This form of democracy (i.e. pure and direct or participating democracy) was obtainable in the ancient Greek city – state because of its relatively small – size. The part of the function namely 'government of the people' derives from the purpose of all government which is to exercise political control over the people. But the phrase 'by the people and for the people' appears confusing. There has been state either in ancient or modern times, where all adult have taken parts directly in the government. Even during the golden age of Greece, all citizens could vote and take part in the government, but the citizenship was limited to certain sections of the populations. So, for the definition to be operational, ruling must be taking in the much weaker

sense of chosen the rulers and influencing their decision. Democratic government therefore emerges by popular representation; a form of government in which the supreme power is retained by the people, but it is indirectly exercised through the system of representation and delegated authority periodically renewed through elections

THE INTER – RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEMOCRACY, LEADERSHIP AND CORRUPTION:

It widely believed that autocratic governments, by the very fact that their powers do not derive from the people, provide a fertile breeding ground for corruption since the hallmark of such administration is lack of transparency and accountability (Akanbi, 2003). This implies that leaders who are product of democratic process would perform to the contrary.

Democracy on the other hand, offers the possible institution of a government that is both responsive and responsible to the people. A government that derives its legitimacy from the people is expected to conduct its affairs on the platform of transparency and accountability. Corruption in turn engenders mismanagement of public resources, which results in underdevelopment, poverty and chaos in the polity.

Stable democratic institutions coupled with virile leadership are expected to be antithetical to corruption. Good leadership and corruption appear to be antagonistic, not just for the fact that a mechanism which is the guaranteed by rule of law is embedded into the system.

However the experience of Nigeria appears to be a total departure from envisaged standard as espoused above. The failure or at best, low performance of the leadership structure in Africa (of which Nigeria is a prominent member) can be appreciated in the view of Joseph (2006), who made an illusion to an award by a Sudanese billionaire, Mo Ibrahim, which should be simply interpreted to be a dash for any worthy leader.

The hope that came with the inauguration of the 4th republic had been replaced by cynicism and sometimes despairs. It takes a weak political structure to witness the type of scam which has portrayed the public servants as kleptocrats with brazen desire to loot the nation's treasury dry. Most of the political leaders are simply anti people, impacting negatively on the psyche of the people leaving a feeling that corruption is a way of life. The culminative effect of which is

pressure the followers themselves put on leaders to acquire wealth by all means. Tella (2012) observed that the magnitude of corruption this day clearly indicates that the incumbent administration's transformation agenda is not for economic development of the nation but economic empowerment of the people in power and their protégés.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY:

A democracy that would engender development would be an all-inclusive one. That is, a kind of democracy where majority of the people has direct access to their elected representatives. Rather than a tiny group of highly influential opinion leaders (political oligarchy), who usually determine the 'political pendulum' of the society. This is in allusion to the affirmed classical meaning of democracy as a collective attribute, which immediately legitimized the mass as collective agents for self-determination.

In other words, basic to any democratic rule is the people's interaction with government with a view to effecting development. According to the most generic notion of democracy now popular in the international arena, we may assume that questions of legitimacy of a policy should always be addressed by those who seek its benefits and bear its cost. Anything otherwise, would amount to a state that does not exist in the consciousness of the people which according to Ayoade (1988) is 'a state without citizens'.

LEGAL/ADMINISTRATIVE INSTRUMENTS: What is really needed to fight corruption is a new approach/policy that rests on a four pronged approach:

- i. The EFCC (Economic and Financial Crime Commission) should be truly independent rather than an arm of the presidency. It should be reporting periodically/directly to the public/people through the National Assembly.
- ii. The process of adjudicating corruption cases needs serious review. The present situation in which cases drag on for years leads to abuse and miscarriage of justice. After all it had been unequivocally argued that justice delayed is justice denied. Delay in dispensation of justice gives room for unwholesome negotiations, bribery, plea bargains and sometimes lost or closed case

files. Plea bargain should be eliminated as it mitigates the deterrent value of corruption convictions and encourages lawyers to profiteer from defending corrupt clients. Setting up a special court to try corruption cases as once requested by Waziri (former EFCC boss), should be considered. Most urgently needed however, are: a ban on bails and plea bargains for those indicted; a special time period (frame) within which their cases must be adjudicated; and stiff penalties for those convicted.

iii. Mass Education of the Public: Public officials and the general public should be thoroughly educated through public seminars, Television and newspaper, advertisements, and memorable jingles about the debilitating effect of corruption. Traditional rulers, religious leaders, the intelligentsia, and other community leaders have a duty to shape public opinion against corruption. The more the public learns about the negative effects, the more the citizens would be prepared to hold public officials accountable. In essence, a mass re-orientation of the psyche of the people is hereby proposed.

iv. Preventive measures should be taken against the menace. Such should include strategies for monitoring budget expenditure; contract and project performance should be established and effectively implemented. Quarterly accountability reports should be mandatory for all tiers of government and parastatals. The rush by the officials in Federal ministries to deplete unspent budget funds at the end of the year has been a dragnet for corruption. Former Speakers of the House of Representative, Dimeji Bankole as cited by Akinnaso (2011), once alleged that over N1tr (one trillion naira) of unspent budget funds were misappropriated over five years. It is either such budgets were phony in the first place or there was no system in place to ensure that money budgeted for a specific project was truly spent on that project.

CONCLUSION:

The eradication of corruption has over the years become more prominent elements in the institutional discourse on development, with United Nations and World Bank urging countries all over the world to carry out reforms to prevent the abuse of power especially in the Third World nations. With calamity that is befalling the nation (Nigeria) in terms of bad leadership, grand corruption, insecurity, food crisis, kidnapping and the like, the future of the country appears to

hang in the balance. Corruption has to be tackled headlong as it is difficult to win the battle against poverty if public funds keep disappearing into private pockets.

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