

Assesement of the Culture of Corruption in Nigeria: The Possible Way Out

AJIBOLA, O.PETER ADU

*General Studies Department The Federal Polytechnic, Ado – Ekiti
Ekiti State, Nigeria*

AMADI, CHIBUIKE.E

*General Studies Department, The Federal Polytechnic, Ede.
Osun State, Nigeria*

FASUBA, OJO YEMI

*Exam & Record Unit, The Federal Polytechnic, Ede.
Osun State, Nigeria*

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria and translates into assenting that Nigerians have the culture of corruption. The Nigerian State has been a victim of high level of corruption in the comity of nations. Corruption has become more persistent since the country rejoined another train of civil rule in May, 1999 after long years of military rule. The jubilations, hopes and outlooks which accompanied the re-democratization of the country since May, 1999 have been upset by bad governance, characterized by weak and, or lack of performance, policy failures and, above all, systemic corruption. Against this background, the paper examines corruption as an open disease of democracy in the country.

The theoretical framework approach sees corruption as arising from weak social, economic and political structures. This approach identifies the exchange of gifts in anticipation of favours. It seems to provide a cultural underpinning to contemporary corruption and makes the question of culture of corruption more pronounced. This paper therefore, aims at exposing the root causes of corruption in Nigeria with the aim of eradicating this ugly monster in addition to re-positioning the anti-corruption bid to improve the economic development in the country to catch up with the global world.

KEY WORDS: Culture, Nigeria, Corruption, Values, Accountability, Governance.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Corruption is perennial in different countries of the world. In Nigeria, it seems to have permeated into the lives of her citizens without any signs that it can be expurgated. Corruption has plague so deep into the Nigeria society that the question on how deep it has penetrated becomes popular.

The truism that corruption is a surest route that hinders development in any society does not need contention. Though, in some quarters, it is argued that corruption could trigger development (Otite, 1986). However, despite this assertion, there is a widespread held opinion condemning corruption in all ramifications and hence, worldwide outcry and call for eradicating the scourge

According to Shuaib (2015:22), he posited that without gain saying, it is a wide held belief that corruption is a way of life in Nigeria and that it is responsible for broken promises and dashed hopes which has characterized the lives of most Nigerians. It is not surprising to hear people saying that Nigerians are corrupt. Making it a fait accompli. More so, Nigeria is a country where corruption is rife and where greed for material acquisition and quest for political power had relegated to the background morals preached by various religions. This is because despite our claim to be religious, our quest for relevance had made nonsense of our self acclaimed religiosity and nothing can be left undone by our elites and non-elites for the realization of their self desire, the end, it is believed justifies the means.

Some scholars presume that corruption is a contemporary issue which colonialism has brought to Nigeria while some argues that the phenomenon is as old as man himself. This study, however, begins with a different questions: *what are the cultural root of corruption in Nigeria?. Is corruption not a progression from*

traditional society? Has Nigerian society practices which can exacerbate corruption? The term corruption brings bad governance under which the entire citizens are at the receiving ends. Some scholars argue that, though stealing is not a moral act but it is not an act of corruption. The argument is that, though stealing involves taking another's belonging but it does not amount to depriving the third person an opportunity. However, in contrary, some scholars argue that any activity which do not promote fair-play, equity, meritocracy etc is termed a corrupt act.

II. PERSPECTIVES OF CORRUPTION

This study proceeds to address opinions on the origin of corruption, with relevant theories. These theories sees corruption as arising from weak social, economic and political arrangement in the society and also see the eradication of corruption as beginning with the overhauling and/or strengthening of these social institutions. Some of these theories are:

Economic theory - This views corruption as arising from interactions between clients. This theory explains that corruption emanates from the business dealing between people or ordinary citizens.

Political theory - This theory views corruption as arising from lack of durable political institutions and political competition and weak and undeveloped civil society.

Poverty theory – It links poverty and economic deprivation to deviant in behaviour of which corruption is part of it.

Maxcist school of thought sees dimension of corruption as the consequence of legalization from concentration of wealth in the hands of few, whose eradication is linked to a reduction of the excesses of capitalism which tends to exploit the poor consumers. Therefore one can contends that it is not people's consciousness that determine their wellbeing but the way the society organizes the production, distribution and exchange of goods and services that determines their material conditions.

The Moralists school of thought see "corruption as an immoral and unethical phenomenon that contains moral aberrations from moral standards of society, causing loss of respect for and confidence in duly constituted authority" (Gould, 1991; cited in Khan, a). Corruption is therefore seen as deviation from formal rules for personal aggrandisement.

The Functionalist school of thought sees corruption as a deviant behaviour which stems from the social structure of the society and exerts a definite pressure upon certain individuals in the society to engage in non-conforming or conforming conduct. Flowing from the above is the fact that a society in which there is an exceptionally strong emphasis upon specific goals without a corresponding institutional means or procedures, will inevitably lead to what Durkheim called "anomie" normlessness or deviation". In Nigeria, material acquisition has become the ultimate goal and the society does not appear to be concerned with how one 'makes' it. All that is important is that one has 'arrived' (Alanamu et al, 2008).

The theory of human nature - It holds that corruption is rooted in man's nature and morbid pursuit of self interest or ergo-drive.

The Socio-cultural approach - which argues that there are some cultural practices which have some elements that favours the development of corruption.

These theories of corruption so formulated by social scientists can be termed the institutional approach to corruption. Seeing that corruption has certain factors of enhancement in traditional Nigeria society and by extension, the African primordial system that seems to have made it easy for corruption to thrive in the contemporary Nigeria, the question of the culture of corruption becomes more imperative.

Answering the question of whether Nigerians have the culture of corruption, which this paper aims at addressing, we will highlight the weaknesses of these institutional approach.

III. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The concept "Corruption" like many other concepts in social sciences has no settled meaning. This means that there is no straight backed definition, or generally accepted, or encompassing definition for the term corruption. However, certain definitional attempts have been proffered by different scholars. Although, there is often difficulties in defining it, because it means not only different things to different people, and even to the same people different things at different times, but also sanctions usually are attached to corrupt practices which hides them and gives them subtle forms. Thus, some people see "corruption" as a conscious and well planned act by a person or group of persons to appropriate by unlawful means the wealth of another person or group of persons. Then to others, it is the act of turning power and authority to receive cash.

Corruption is a common word used by both adults and children because it is found in every aspect of Nigeria. This monster called corruption has now been nick named in most Nigerian languages especially in the major three languages...., the Igbos call it Igbuozu, the Yorubas call it Egunje while the Hausas call it Chuachua. People no longer frown or feel ashamed to engage in corrupt practices. Chuachua / Egunje or Igbuozu is now acceptable and it is possible to hear someone openly complaining that there is no Chuachua, Egunje or Igbuozu

at his or her place of work and as such a person might quickly resign if he or she finds another work where there is opportunity for Chuachua. It is bad as that, (Iyanda, 2012:37).

For (Agbese, 1982), “corruption is a phenomenon so difficult to define, yet it percolates every structure of the society. It affects the military as well as it soils the hands of the civilians”. He went further to define corruption as follows:

*“when we use our position in society to secure certain advantages jumping a queue, being waved off at the checkpoint or making others bend the rules to accommodate our demands ... by whatever means even if it is just ‘thank you’ our action however innocent, however well intentional, however unthreatening to others, has corrupted a system or a convention or some rules and regulations in application.”*In this regard, even whatever form of seasonal gifts, free air tickets, lunch or diner – “kola” is no longer exempted, since these are likely to influence future courses of action and transactions the giver or receiver is thus corrupting protocol or breaching some rules and regulations in the society. He also noted that “corruption is the diversion of resources from the betterment of the community to the gain of individuals at the expense of the community”, and that a public official is corrupt if he accepts money or money’s worth for doing something that he is under a duty to do or to exercise a legitimate discretion for improper reason. Then for Malam Adamu Ciroma, corruption is “the deliberate binding of the system to favour of friends or hurt foes, any misbehaviour deviation from or perversion of the system, or misleading Nigerians or giving them wrong or distorted information about things they ought to know.” Thus, any act or behaviour or omission, committed, internationally or not to influence the actions of another, the influential and the influenced, respectively has corrupted a system which is detrimental to the entire society. In another perspective, the political science school see “corruption” as “an optimal means of bypassing the queues and bureaucratic inertia and hence conducive to economic growth”. While the economics school like (Krueger 1974), saw “corruption” as “an external manifestation of rent seeking behaviour on the part of individuals”

But the Webster Dictionary defines corruption as:... that act of corruption or the state of being corrupt putrefactive decomposition, putrid matter, moral pervasion depravity, pervasion of integrity. Corrupt or dishonest proceedings, bribery, perversion from a state of purity, debasement as of a language; a debased form of a word. It is equally the misapplication of public goods (broadly construed) to private ends. Bandfield (2014 85) defines corruption as the process of obtaining material enrichment or opportunities for oneself and or for others, through the use of public office (or influence) in ways other than those publicly acknowledge through rules and procedures of what Corruption is in Nigeria. The term corruption (middle English, from Latin corruptus, past participle of corrumpere, to destroy: com-, intensive pref and rumpere, to break) When used as adverb literally means “utterly broken”. Corruption or corrupt may refer to:

- Political corruption
- Corporate corruption
- Corruption (linguistics) is the change in meaning to a language or a text introduced by cumulative errors in transcription as in a changes in the language speakers’ comprehension
- Bribery in politics, business, or sport (including match fixing)

Flowing from the above, political corruption is the use of legislated power by government officials for illegitimate private gain. Misuse of government power for other purposes such as repression of political opponents and police brutality is not considered political corruption. All forms of government are susceptible to political corruption. Forms of corruption vary, but include bribery, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, graft, and embezzlement. While corruption may facilitate criminal activities such as ritual killing, human trafficking, drug trafficking, money laundering etc, it is not restricted to these activities. The activities that constitute illegal corruption differ depending on the country or jurisdiction. For instance, certain political funding practices that are legal in one place may be illegal in another place. In some cases, government officials broad or poorly defined powers, which makes it difficult to distinguish between legal and illegal action. However, this notwithstanding, the basic practices of corruption such as nepotism, bribery and embezzlement, remain traditional paradigms of measuring corruption.

Corruption cannot be pinned down to a particular country but quite is rampant around the world. Britain Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) estimated over 1 trillion US dollars to bribery alone worldwide.

IV. SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES AND CAUSAL FACTORS THAT ENHANCES CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

This theory argues that some cultural practices have elements which favours the development and spread of corruption. These elements include the customary exchange of gift for anticipated favour, allocation of ‘Lions share’ of food, meat or drink to the head of the family, giving of chieftaincy titles to the money bags among others. This theory argues that there is a very thin line between a gift and a tip or a bribe. Thus, such cultural practice that demands the show of appreciation for favour done turns around to favour the existence of

corruption. There is an argument against the objection that the appreciation for favour received turns around to favour the existence of corruption.

In the view of Chinweuba & Ezeugwu (2016), the customary exchange of gifts prevalent in most Nigerian cultures has degenerated to bribery and favouritism. Though, the practice is explained as gratitude for favours received. It is interpreted in terms of appreciation of one's personality or portfolio filled with anticipatory undertone. Factually, such gifts weaken the moral character of the recipient, and form an influence around his activities to the benefit of the giver.

Thus the traditional 'exchange of gifts' and 'recognition' prevalent in most Nigerian cultures expose the thin line, create a sharp link between 'appreciation and anticipation' and convey an undue advantage on the giver, which eventually leads to corruption. In line with the above, it would also be correct that gifts are offered in anticipation for an act of kindness by the recipient to the giver, or in anticipation of some reciprocities from the recipient (i.e. public official) in the form of favours. Gifts can thus insidiously corrupt a public official. It may therefore be said that the traditional practice of giving gifts to elders, or to public officials and "big men" and "big women" in government in the modern political setup is the causal factor in political corruption (Gyekye:1997).

The argument is that showing appreciation is not intended to confer undue advantage but gratitude. The socio-cultural approach sees gifts exchanging hands in virtually every important transaction in the traditional society, often before the transaction. It traces similarity between electoral corruption in Nigeria and electoral corruption in traditional Nigerian society. It sees equal similarities in the pressure on the political of the extended family and community on an average Nigerian public official towards embezzlement and nepotism. This is often rewarded with chieftaincy titles. The contribution of the traditional metaphysical foundations of political leadership in Nigeria, and the fact that the extended family, clan and tribe rather than the nation, demands the primary allegiance of the average Nigerian, and government and state are still seen as foreign.

Ekeh, (1975:18), distinguished two African societies: the primordial and the civic. These societies have their respective moral values. What is termed 'corrupt' in civic African society may not be so in the primordial Nigerian society. Ekeh further observed that while many Africans bend over backwards to benefit and sustain their primordial origin, they lean back to civic Africa for whatever they will gain.

According to him, (Ibid:23), the individual's relationship with the civic public is measured in material terms ... while the individual seek to gain from the civic public, there is no moral urge on him to give back to the society in return for his benefits... Duties are de-emphasized while rights are Squeezed out of the civic society with the morality of an artful dodger.

He also noted that the unwritten law is that it is legitimate to rob the civic society as long as it is to strengthen the primordial society. He traces the anti-state attitudes to the era of colonialism and the fight for liberation across the continent, which involved sabotage of government through absenteeism, strike and tax evasion. For him, these subversive activities did not stop with colonial era but was carried over to the post-colonial era. Hence, *we are stuck with the practice*. In an ethnographic study of the Igbos, Ani observes that some of what is termed corrupt in the West is morally justified and even praiseworthy by Igbo cultural standard⁹. This is because in Igbo culture, the individual has access to resources through reciprocity and obligation practices long embedded in family, lineage and community. Western forms of access through highly organized welfare state programmes, adequate salaries and expansive markets among a list of many pre-conditions, are not part of the Nigerian political economy. He argued that these give-and-take transactions are governed by subtle conventions that will escape the eye of a Westerner with his conventional definition of corruption. For instance, a secondary school student whose score in her tertiary institution admission test is not enough to secure admission for her but her mother realized that she has a friend in the federal ministry of education. The friend promised that she will add her name in the discretionary ministers list but for this favour, the mother of the student will pay a certain amount of money. In the ethnographic evidence, it is not the money but the connection that pave way for the student to get admission; though in the eye of the West, a corrupt act has taken place but it is not so. The money paid by the mother of this student actually represented a social distance. The friend at the ministry would almost surely have rejected money if it came from his or her own relation. The rule of the state applies that to help a total stranger by taking money is not allowed but to help your own relation to get admission when her mark are below the cut-off is expected and morally justified, going by the rule of kinship, community and reciprocity, which is apply when the stakes are personal and communal.

According to Philips & Akpogighe (2014:35), many reasons have been put forward as probable causes for the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria. This ranges from non-conformity to religious tenets, imparted values and ideas alien to our culture, ethnicity which encourages favoritism and nepotism, a weak legal system which is honored in the breach than observance. The political bureau in its report mentioned such causes as excessive materialism generated by our individual capitalist order which emphasize personal wealth without regard to the collective interest and welfare of the larger society.

Other causes of poverty, illiteracy, get-rich- mania, statism, and wrong attitude to public property, absence of a welfare scheme which cushions effect of unemployment, retirement, large families, and quest for power, double standards and low level of patriotism. These are important in themselves; it does appear that poverty is the most important single factor that promotes the wide spread of giving and taking bribes i.e. illegal financial inducements in the country.

The two scholars' submission above is further corroborated when they argued that, other reasons that can be adduced for the endemic culture of corruption in Nigeria are as follows:

- (a) Giving and receiving bribes
- (b) Inflation of contract sum
- (c) Receiving kick-backs and payment upfront from contracts awarded
- (d) Abuse of public property
- (e) Lodging government fund in private accounts
- (f) Examination malpractices and frauds in academic institutions
- (g) Adulterated food or hazardous drugs
- (h) Misappropriation and embezzlement of fund
- (i) Money laundry by public officers
- (j) Using proxy names to buy property.
- (k) Culture of affluent and get rich syndrome.
- (l) Fraud, illegal withdrawal of money in another persons account perpetrated by 'yahoo-boys' in Nigeria.
- (m) Non- virile and weak institutions of government.
- (n) Desecration of cultural values - Some cultural and institutional factors could lead to corruption. For example, nepotism and strength of family values/ties are linked to the feeling of obligation.

In addition, Nye (1967), cited in Shuaib (ibid:29) was of the view that corruption is a times caused by motivational behaviour which is a response to social pressures but which violate the set goals and objectives of a social system. In Nigeria for instance, individual rights are often subordinated to groups' interests and allegiance to ethnic interests is considered more important than public accountability or national interest.

Consequently, individuals who became successful in the public sector are expected to share benefits with selected few (their accomplices and associates).

Poor reward system - low remuneration for public servants and greed account for corruption related behaviour or actions. The reward system in Nigeria is, perhaps, the poorest in the world. Some states in the federation owed workers between two-six month salaries as at June, 2015. Yet, these members of the society are expected to be honest, productive and train their children in a most honourable manner without getting their salaries. Corrupt acts become the alternative means to achieve their objectives and make ends meet because they cannot depend solely on their meager salaries for a decent living (Obuah, 2010).

Lukewarm attitudes of law enforcement agents – (police, judges etc) forced some officials to be corrupt because they believe they could go unpunished and get away with their unwholesome acts. Those in this group are called the sacred cows, the untouchable, the cabals just to mention a few.

Democracy failure and weak political system – The Nigerian state has been a victim of high level corruption in the comity of nations. Corruption has become more persistent since the country rejoined another train of civil rule in may 1999 after long years of military rule. The jubilations, hopes and outlooks which accompanied the redemocratization of the since may 1999 have been upset by bad governance, characterised by the weak, or lack of performance, policy failures and, above all, systemic corruption (Abubakar, et al : 2019)

V. THE CONSEQUENCIES AND EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION

The consequences and effects of corruption in Nigeria include loss of government revenue, negative natural image, poor governance, brain drain, electoral malpractices, poor investment, business failure, high cost of goods and services, unemployment and poverty. Corruption, according to Suleiman (2011:14) is believed to be the bane of development in Nigeria, it has been largely responsible for the stunted economic growth of the country and for the mass poverty that reigns in the land (Nigeria). The quality of public infrastructure and services has continued to be low as a result of corruption.

Nigerians have long suffered from bad roads, epileptic power supply and lack of potable water and affordable housing. Avoidable accidents happen on the highways daily largely due to bad roads and unrepaired, many factories and businesses have shut down due to rising overhead costs as a result of poor power supply from the institutions responsible for energy distribution in Nigeria. Most of the country's cosmopolitan cities and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have been turned into glorified slums because there are no housing schemes for the masses to live in.

Flowing from the above, the culture of corruption in Nigeria is such that the leaders acquired wealth illegally in order to enrich themselves, thereby subjecting the masses to abject poverty which translates to poor

governance. They actually turn the qualified electoral voters into 'vote sellers' before and during elections period.

A critical look at corruption however reveals the weak moral character of Nigerians as its prime cause. For the moral character of an individual builds fundamentally from beliefs, moral laws, values, ideals, etc provided by human cultural traditions.

These cultural elements based on their nature strengthen or weaken human will and character. Consequently, corruption fundamentally arises from culture. As a rider to this, worst still, is the fact that most cultural traditions domiciled in Nigeria even abet and institutionalize corruption by endorsing the mere presence of wealth. Evidently, these cultures acknowledge, respect, appreciate and reward wealthy individuals irrespective of the dubious origins and ugly circumstances underlining their riches. In these cultures, suffice to say is that, societal authority has cultivated the act of dashing out traditional chieftaincy titles in exchange for gifts and other materials.

In another development, Ribadu (2006) argued that corruption is responsible for perpetual collapse of infrastructure and institutions; it is the cause of the endemic poverty in Africa, it is behind the underdevelopment and cyclical failure of democracy to take root in Africa. Corruption is worse than terrorism, Public Officials who are corrupt should receive worse treatment than that reserved for terrorists. He argued further that corruption has affected grassroots involving ordinary vendors, peasants, street hawkers, and small business owners who corrupt public officials and other bureaucrats compromising them from performing their lawful duties.

In another development, the effects of corruption on any nation, according to Ogundiya (2009 : 152) are socially, economically and politically damaging. In Nigeria, corruption has been responsible for gross social and political instability which had bedeviled the country since her independence.... in 1960. He further stressed that in Nigeria, politics is money and money is politics. The 'outside elites' are always determined to force the 'inside elites' out of the corridor of power, while the later are also obstinate in retaining power by force. For this reason, contract killing or political assassinations have become part and parcel of Nigeria's political culture.

Above all, corruption has been used by many scholars as potent explanation for Nigeria's development tragedy and backwardness

Corruption leads to abandonment of projects that could have accelerated national development in all facets. Examples are Ajaokuta and Aladja steel project, Itakpe iron ore, the inland rolling mills and machine tools in Oshogbo, the paper mill in Akwa Iboku in cross river and so many abandoned projects of federal, state and local governments. There is also re-cycling of projects, 10% kicks back syndrome is also common at the three tiers of government (Terlumun, 2015).

Corruption diverts public expenditure from sectors that benefit the poor away to the sectors and projects where kick-backs can be readily obtained (Audu, 2008).

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has established desecration and non-conformity to both religious and cultural values, poverty, giving and receiving bribes, get-rich-syndrome and frauds perpetrated by "yahoo-boys" among other things as consequences of culture of corruption in Nigeria. It is however very sad that the menace called corruption has eaten so deep to the fabrics of Nigerian societies to the extent that it has permeated all sectors.

To win the war on corruption and in order to break this cycle, it is expedient therefore that the citizens must cultivate the culture of proper adherence to both cultural and ethical codes, employment should be based on merit while corrupt practices are appropriately addressed with the institutions saddled with such responsibility and offenders must be brought to book by punitive measures.

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