



Corruption and Government Mechanisms in Nigeria: Diagnosis and Treatment

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Abstract: As widely perceived by many that corruption and other unethical conducts have become a destructive cankerworm that has eaten deep in every nation's economy. Although, the scenario is not common only to Nigeria but the manner at which the ill-gotten wealth individuals were being celebrated in country is highly alarming. Nigeria is known for its series of anti-corruption mechanisms put in place by the government in order to curtail the menace in the society. Upon the establishment of the Military Legislations to curb the menace in 1975 under Generals Murtala Ramatu Muhammed and Olusegun Obasanjo down to 1999 under the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo where two separate anti-corruption bodies were formed (ICPC and EFCC), and to the present Administration under President Muhammadu Buhari where whistleblowing mechanism is introduced, the level of corruption is more pronounced and rampant both in public and private sectors of the Nigeria's economy. One will be wondering why Nigeria is yet to put total remedies to the scourge of corruption in the country. The study proffers some hints, if it can be adopted by the government to strengthen the anti-corruption tools put in place. Some of the measures include, the inclusion of individuals, all and sundry in the fight against corruption. As opined by the collective action theory employed by the study, corruption cannot be fought and won in isolation but requires collective efforts and change of masses' orientation on the need to return sanity back to Nigeria. Similarly, our religious and traditional leaders have numerous roles to play in reducing unethical conducts in the society. Conferment of religious or traditional titles to those that do not deserve it in the society should be corrected and discouraged in its totality. When these and many more are done, there is every possibility that Nigeria will be a lesser corrupt country and great again.

Keywords: Nigeria, EFCC, whistle-blowing, corruption, unethical conducts

1. Introduction

Corruption as endemic has embedded deep into many countries (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016). Corruption as widely perceived has become one of the major challenges facing African economy, and the rate at which the cankerworm spreads in Nigeria is alarming that has eaten deeply into the country's economy. Invariably, the cankerworm has nearly soiled the good image and reputation of Nigeria at both the intra and international arena. Nigeria is blessed with varieties of abundant natural resources to the level that some scholars or researchers concluded that, the country is endowed heavily with mineral or natural resources that, natural resources that is not found in the country does not connote that such is not present but yet to be discovered. These are parts of what has made Nigeria to be a greater point to reckon with by many countries in the globe and particularly during the decisions making process at the international arena. Having endowed with varieties of both human and material resources, one will be wondering why the country, Nigeria is still at its Sorry State of underdeveloped stage when compare with some of the countries that received their independence at the same time.

The issue of Corruption in Nigeria has taken a new dimension where by the communities are celebrating looters over their illicit acts. The looters in today's Nigerian society are those accorded and decorated with many traditional titles with high honours (Dauda, Ahmad & Keling, 2020). This has also graduated to conferment of religious titles and its sorts to those that are obviously believed to have looted the country's treasury. This is simply because, people with ill-gotten wealth will be those that are conferred with a high religious title and at the same time found at the first congregation roll during ceremonial occasions and other religious gathering in the society. In a nutshell, the corruption and its perpetrators have become hero that the society is celebrating due to what people aspiring or aiming to achieve from them.

Corruption and other fraudulent acts have done great harm to Nigerians and the country's economy (Dauda & Ameen, 2017). This has influenced the government to device some mechanisms to curb the menace of the cankerworm in the Nigeria society. As rightly posited by the former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan that "in ways large and small, corruption hurts us all, it impedes social and economic development. It erodes the public's trust, hurts investment and undermines democracy and the rule of law. It facilitates terrorism, conflict and organized crime" (Bracking, 2007). This assertion implies that corruption cannot do a country any benefit to any nation. In other word, the fight against corruption should be seen as a war that must be won. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that the study will examine some of the factors that influence corruption in Nigeria and the measures formulated by the government to reduce, if not total eradication of it in the society.

2. Method

The study makes use of related literature on corruption and other unethical practices with specific interest to Nigeria's matters. The study is qualitative that makes use of secondary source of data such as books, journal articles, policy documents, bulletins, Newspapers and the likes.

3. Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Collective Action Theory to examine corruption tendencies and the mechanisms put in place by the Nigerian government to curb the menace. Collective action theory is also known as "free-rider problem". The theory implies that apart from whatsoever mechanism that might have been put in place by government to curb the menace, the role of every individual and groups count if the system is to record success in its fight against the unethical behaviours in the society (Olson, 1965). As argued by Willer (2004:3), "when all individuals withhold contribution, collective action fails and all are worse off. If individuals all act in their own material self-interest in these situations, it would seem impossible for public goods to be produced." The collective action theory serves as a motivational tool that encourage individuals on the need to be actively participate in every action that will bring sanity to the system for the mutual benefit of all and sundry.

The Collective Action Theory emanates in order to correct the persistent unethical practices and behaviours in the society inspite of the mechanisms, laws, legislations and regulations put in place. The theory is beyond the relationship and reaction of individuals on how they perceive things in the society. According to Persson et al (2013) who viewed systemic corruption as a "collective problem, because people rationalize their own behavior based on the perceptions of what others will do in the same situation". Meaning that, when corruption and unethical practices become order of the day, people will continue to take the advantage of the imbalance in the system to perpetrate their evil plans. People of the society are aware of the negative impact of corruption to the environment but they considered the action as being right perhaps due to their naïve thinking.

In such kind of situation, any anti-corruption mechanism put in place by the government will yield less or nothing due to non-compliance to the rules by the people. In other word, the people or set of group who are expected to protect and implement the anti-corruption measures would be found of contributing to some unethical conducts in the society. Therefore, no matter the anti-corruption measures set up by the government to correct some imbalances in the society, individual inputs is paramount to the effective and efficient fights of corruption tendencies in the society. The employment of collective action theory to the study is to showcase to the society that the willingness and readiness of the government alone might not put total end to corruption and other kinds of indiscipline in the society except masses' supports and change of orientation.

4. Factors Influencing Corruption in Nigeria

As observed by many that corruption differs from country to country. Many scholars had given numerous views on what could have influenced corruption and other unethical practices / behaviors in African society, particularly in Nigeria where the act has become part of its daily activities. The following reasons have been adduced to be factors influencing corruption in Nigeria: Patronage and Societal Pressures, Political Factors, Lack of transparency, weakness of the enforcement tools or apparatus put in place by the government and naïve perception of the masses.

Additionally, family role on corruption is a contributing factor to unethical behavior in Nigerian society (Dauda, Ahmad & Keling, 2020). The pressure from family members or relations to encourage people at the helm of affairs particularly when such is perceive as their own turn to take advantage of the system is encouraging corruption in the

country. In Nigeria for instance, every available opportunity by the political appointees or public officers are to acquire wealth by all means irrespective of whether such is moral or otherwise.

Similarly, scholars such as Asuru (2015) and Raditchokwa (1999) attributed the unethical practices in Africa to poverty, bureaucratic inefficiency, under-development, masses low participation in policy making process, and leadership crisis which has led many political elites into all forms of indiscipline acts. Another scholar also subscribed to the assertion that the underdevelopment nature of Nigeria, masses level of orientation, lack of proper sanction against the wrongdoers, ethnicity and the myopic thinking which has influence the individual mentality to have directed their mindset on the need to acquire what does not belong to them my all means and at all cost formed parts of contributing factors paving way for corruption in the country (Aniele, 2004).

Nevertheless, Nigeria situation and system has even showcase that lack of ethics in the society has contributed negatively to the havoc caused by corruption and immoral behavior in the country. Evidences from various studies have proved that unethical practices in Nigeria have caused much harm on the performance and productivities in both government and private establishment. This is as a result of greediness and ill motive among the individual in Nigeria. In other words, the following factors could as well cause corruption and other immoral behavior in our society. These include: the low level of economy, countries with closed economy, the influence of religion, level of education among the masses, and the role of media or low media freedom.

The Political and Economic Environment determine the level of corruption a country has. The greater the economic activity of a country, the higher the authority and the power of officials in decision making and the higher its vulnerability to corruption. Again, corruption affects monetary policy of any country. Irrespective of whether a State has a well regulated financial sector, there will be some leakages where informal economy or black market found their ways. The creation of artificial friction to serve as a blockage to all sorts of leakages is considered as some of the avenue that enables civil servants to obtain bribes. And if adequate care is not taken, it could invariably lead to ineffective and unclear regulations which are capable of encouraging a discipline and descent individual to pay bribes all in the name of getting things done on time.

Corruption can occur from poor remuneration. If an employee is receiving a low salary for the service rendered to public, in an attempt to improve his/her financial position, he may be tempted to take bribes and affect many other ethical practices in the course of providing service to the public.

5. Impact of Corruption on The Nigeria's Economy

Corruption and other unethical practices have been condemned out rightly by the two scriptures (Al-Qur'an and the Holy Bible). The following are some of the negative impact of corruption to the economy;

Corruption increases the volume of public investment as there are many options that allow for public expenditure, manipulation are carried out by high level officials in order to get bribes. This also connote that as the government expenditure increases which has a greater impact on the budget, such offers more avenue for corruption tendencies.

Corruption redirects the composition of public expenditure from the required items or amenities to an unavoidable materials or attention which may or may not attract public appreciation or needs.

Corruption is capable of pulling down the composition of public expenditure from the necessary fixed assets for health and other basic infrastructure to an unnecessary project which could be described as a white elephant investment. Tax revenue and other income generated by government could be reduced by corruption and invariably make government irresponsible to the masses who are expecting more from the government as the dividend of democracy.

Corruption affects the size and composition of foreign investments and the size of public investments.

The impact of corruption could be felt from the assistance and supports that a country is receiving or expecting from Western or advanced nations such financial aids, sponsoring of projects, borrowing to finance local projects and activities.

6. Government's Efforts Towards Curbing The Menace in Nigeria

Having recognized the likely effect and baneful repercussion of corruption in Nigerian, the government has devised numerous measures to curtail the act from endangering the country. These measures have been dated back to 1975 where the federal government of Nigeria under Generals Murtala Muhammed and Olusegun Obasanjo formulated legislation to curb the monster of unethical practices in Nigerian society. Between 1975 and 1979 the administrations of Generals Murtala Muhammed and Olusegun Obasanjo ensured sanity and discipline in the civil service. Those that found wanting of one misconduct or the other were either dismissed or forced to retire without being given proper fair hearing due to the military decrees (Olufemi, 2014).

Similarly, under the administration of President Shehu Shagari between 1979-1983, another body regulating the unethical conduct known as Nigerian Ethical Revolution came on board (Ejumudo & Ikenga, 2015). The programme introduced by administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari was able to correct some wrong doing particularly among the civil servants before the administration was overthrown by another military government.

In the same vein, the military government under the headship of Generals Muhammadu Buhari and Babatunde Idiagbon who took over the power in 1984 introduced an anti-corruption programme known as the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) (Dauda, Ahmad & Keling, 2020). The military government dealt with corruption in Nigeria to minimum level to the extent that moral and ethical behaviors were inculcated in act of every civil servants both at work place and at their various home.

Nevertheless, another military government headed by President Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida came on board in 1985. This regime replaced the anti-corruption programme met on ground with another mechanism called Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER). The programme was perceived by many as a mere cosmetic due to the style adopted in fighting against the corruption in the country.

Furthermore, in 1993 another military government took over the power under the leadership of General Sanni Abacha. Just like other previous administration, Abacha's regime created another body to fight corruption in Nigeria which was known as National Orientation Agency (NOA). NOA was formulated by the government to enlighten and orientate the masses particularly the civil servants on the need for change of attitude towards their services to the country (Olufemi, 2014).

In 1999, Nigeria was returned to another democratic government under the headship of President Olusegun Obasanjo. Obasanjo's administration re-introduced another measure known as the "Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission" to curtail and curb the unethical practices in the country both among the civil servants, the political office holders, the contractors and its sorts. The Act was later passed by the National Assembly in the year 2000 which led to the creation of the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) (Nwaodu, Adam & Okereke, 2014).

Having empowered the new anti-corruption commission by the National Assembly, the commission started its assignment by investigating the highest law making body over charges of corruption against them. This action of the ICPC canvassed for the change of position by the National Assembly to repeal the ICPC Act which was not only refuted smartly but signed into law by President Olusegun Obasanjo. As observed by many scholars, the actions and attitude of Nigerian Legislators attest to the extent of corruption in Nigerian society particularly among elites and the ruling class (Dauda, Ahmad & Keling, 2020; Olufemi, 2014). The ICPC as an anti-graft agency has recorded tremendously in its fight against corruption and other related offences. As opined by Olubajo (2021), the Commission as at July, 2021 had secured 180 cases conviction from various Nigerian courts of law. The source further revealed that the Commission recovered over N1.1 billion and 29 buildings forfeited to the Federal government.

In addition to the formation of ICPC as an institution to check corruption in Nigeria, the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo also established another anti-crime commission known as the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) (Dauda, Ahmad & Keling, 2020). The two agencies play vital role in monitoring the affairs of both public and private enterprises in Nigeria in order to ensure moral and ethical conduct in the system.

Having discussed some of the measures put in place by past administration, the present administration under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari is not left out in combating corruption in Nigeria. The Buhari's administration introduced Whistle-Blowing mechanism as a way of exposing corruption and nefarious activities in the society. The position of President Buhari was attested to by the former Minister of Finance, Kemi Adeosun, who expressed that, Whistleblowing will serve as a deterrent to corrupt minded people of Nigeria and indirectly reduce the level of corruption in the country (Ncheta, 2017). The whistle-blowing mechanism as an act of curbing corruption in Nigeria has been worldly applauded and appreciated by many Nigerians both home and abroad as a giant stride to curb the menace of deadly cankerworm that has eaten deep into the system.

Similarly, same government under the watch of President Muhammadu Buhari signed new three bills into law as part of the measures to combat corrupt practices and other illicit acts in Nigeria (Elumoye & Olugbode, 2022; Vanguard Newspaper, 2022). These bills include: the Money Laundering (Prevention and Prohibition) Bill, 2022; the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Bill, 2022 and; the Proceeds of Crime (Recovery and Management) Bill, 2022. According to the President:

"The signing of these Bills into law today not only strengthens the Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) framework in the Country, but addresses the deficiencies identified in Nigeria's 2nd round of Mutual Evaluation as assessed by Inter-Governmental Action Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa on compliance with the Financial Action Task Force global standards (The Stata Office, 2022)."

He added that "the new laws have provided enough punitive measures and containment strategies against abuses and compromises, and that We will not rest until we rid the nation of the menace of money laundering, terrorism, and other financial crimes," (Vanguard Newspaper, 2022).

7. Conclusion and Way Forward

Having identified numerous havocs done to our economy and the polity at large, one will conclude that a reasonable government should have it at the back of its mind on how best to curtail the menace of corruption and its practices in our society. In fact, this is one of the agenda of the present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari in its fight to curb the cankerworm by saying “if we (Nigerians) don’t kill corruption, it will kill us” (Onoyume, 2015). Similarly, it has been observed that there is no way one will be fighting corruption that the cankerworm will not fight back, nevertheless, the leaders must be firm, focused and prepared to withstand the unexpected. It is at this point that the following suggestions are proffered to enhance soft landing for the fight against corruption in Nigeria:

There should be adequate and full enforcement of legal and other apparatus put in place to combat or check corrupt practices and other unethical behaviours in Nigeria. Doing this and making a scapegoat among the violators without discriminating, fear or favour, evil perpetrators among the citizens of the country will be forced to adjust positively and act in accordance with the dictates of law and regulations governing the country.

There should be proper and adequate sensitization and awareness on the likely danger pose by this illicit act to the country’s economy and its citizens. This can be done via the National Orientation Agencies, both government and private owned media, among others.

The role of our religion leaders is also important in correcting abnormal practices or behaviours among citizens. Nigeria is a country that celebrates religious dictates and the leaders. In the course of preaching the teaches of the Holy books, the religions leaders could use the avenue to admonish and caution their congregation on the need to shun all sorts of unethical conducts and portray themselves in the manner dictate by the holy books. Also the religious leaders should be discouraged from celebrating the ill-gotten wealth among members and shun act of conferment of religious title to the undeserved members in their congregation all in the name of money.

Government Acts, mechanisms and tools put in place such as EFCC, ICPC, Investment and Security Tribunal, Whistleblowing, among others should be empowered to prosecute the offenders without unnecessary influence or directive from the authority above. The Nigerian Judiciary should be adequately remunerated and empowered to deliver timely justice without any undue influence, fear or favour. The media should be given adequate freedom in order to expose corrupt activities in the society. This could be done by signing of freedom of speech for the media to enhance their professional performance and practices. There should be rewards for good and positive conduct or behaviour in the society in order to motivate and encourage others to always have positive attitudes and behaviour without been monitored or coerced by anyone. There should be compensation and protection for the whistleblowers that expose unethical practices or behaviours in any organization. All parents should as a matter of urgency give/teach their wards good habits and inculcate in them the beauty of contentment while they are still young.

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