

## AN ASSESSMENT OF FACTORS THAT PROMOTES CORRUPTION AMONGST PUBLIC OFFICE HOLDERS IN NIGERIA

Olayemi Jacob Ogunniyi & James Onochie Akpu

University of Ibadan

&

Abodunrin Olukayode Amosun

Lagos State University

### Abstract

Corruption is as old as society itself and cuts across nations, races and class of people. Corruption even though a global problems lack a universally accepted definition and it can be categorized from different perspectives and even classified according to how it is carried out in relation to established rules in administration. Undoubtedly, corruption leads to impoverishment, loss of lives and also weakens the stability of society. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank sees corruption as ‘the abuse of public office’ perhaps through the instrumentality of private agents, who offer bribes actively to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit. The issue of corruption to people of Nigeria is not a new phenomenon, in recent years it got to an alarming proportion. Further afield, in Nigeria society, corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of the nation, and this act not only perpetrated by those who govern but by the governed. Corruption and abuse of power, position and privileges have long been noticed to have contributed to the country’s underdevelopment. This paper made use of both primary and secondary sources to examine several of those factors that promote the issue of corruption in Nigeria which includes slow judicial process, bad leadership, and self-aggrandizement among politicians, poor economy, and insatiable lust for wealth, false declaration of assets, falsification and forgery of certificate amongst others. Recommendations were made as a way out of these mentioned problems to corruption.

**Keywords:** Impoverishment, Nigeria, Society, Corruption.

### Introduction

Corruption is an endemic evil that totally cripples any form of development in any society. The vice is not exclusive to African States as there are several instances of its manifestation across the globe. However, the continual rise of its perpetuation in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular with its attendant “encouragement” (as the government has not sufficiently carried out steps to tackle the problem) has made these regions the home-base of the vice. It is in line with this statement that the anti-corruption watchdog, Transparency International (TI) in its Corruption Perception Index 2015 has placed Nigeria as the 136th corrupt country in the world out of a total of 175 countries “on a scale from 100 (very clean) to 0 (highly corrupt)”.<sup>1</sup>

Every country at some time in their history has had to battle with corruption. The World Development Report seems to agree with this statement when in a release on corruption, the report states that:

All societies have corrupt features in the sense that some public money is illicitly diverted for private gain. The particular circumstances of developing countries—rapid social and economic change, strong kinship ties, new institutions, overlapping and sometimes conflicting views about proper public behaviour - may be particularly conducive to corruption.<sup>2</sup>

History has taught that elsewhere, rather than leading to poverty and underdevelopment, the campaign against corruption has given birth to good governance, rapid economic and political development and the reduction of man's inhumanity to man<sup>3</sup> as against the situation in Nigeria. Since corruption is believed to exist in all societies, although its occurrence is more in some societies than in others, and definitely more common at some times in the evolutionary phase of a society than at other times,<sup>4</sup> it is therefore not surprising that Nigeria at this particular time in her history is still battling with and in fact losing the fight against corruption.

It is an incontrovertible fact that corruption has been the bane of Nigeria's development. Thus, without mincing words the phenomenon has ravaged the country and destroyed most of what is held as cherished national values. Unfortunately, the public office holders saddled with the responsibility of directing the affairs of the country have been the major culprit in perpetrating this act. Regrettably, since independence a notable surviving legacy of the successive political leadership both civilian and military that have managed the affairs of the country at different times has been the institutionalization of corruption in all agencies of the public service, which, like a deadly virus, has subsequently spread to the private sector of the country.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, it is a paradox that Nigeria, the world's eighth largest exporter of crude oil, a country endowed with many resources, still has more than 70% of its population living below the poverty line as a result of corruption and economic mismanagement. Pathetically, the logic of the Nigerian political leadership class has been that of self-service as some of the leaders are mired in the pursuit of selfish and personal goals at the expense of broader national interests. Consequently, emphasis has been on personal aggrandizement and self-glorification with the result that corruption has become an euphemism for explaining political leadership in Nigeria in relation to the management of national wealth.<sup>6</sup>

In recent years, the debilitating effects of corruption to the growth and development of any society has been given so much attention by writers, academic and non-academic.<sup>7</sup> As a result, this paper would not concern itself with a conceptual definition of corruption but on how corruption reduction in the public service would help in achieving the development pursuit of 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

Although there is no widespread or comprehensive definition as to what constitutes corrupt behaviour, the most prominent definitions share a common emphasis on the abuse of public power or position for personal advantage. A simple dictionary definition of the phenomenon refers to it as "an impairment of virtue and moral principles".<sup>8</sup> According to the World Bank and Transparency International (TI), a leading global anti-corruption watchdog, corruption is the abuse of public office for private gains for the benefit of the holder of the office or some third party. Viewed from these definitions, political corruption can be broadly understood as unethical behaviour, which violates the norms of the system of political order.<sup>9</sup> Basically, political corruption can be for private and group enrichment and for power

preservation purposes. Often, these two forms of political corruption are connected. In fact, some of the larger and more serious political corruption scandals include both processes. Political corruption usually encompasses abuses by government officials such as embezzlement and cronyism, as well as abuses linking public and private actors such as bribery, extortion, influence peddling, and fraud, to mention but a few. In this regard, corruption threatens good governance, sustainable development, democratic process, and fair business practices.

As M. McMullan put it, corruption occurs when a public official accepts money for doing something that he is under a duty not to do.<sup>10</sup> Corruption is also an extra legal institution used by individuals or groups to gain influence over the actions of the bureaucracy.<sup>11</sup> The pattern of corruption may be said to exist in a situation where a power holder who is charged with doing certain things, that is, responsible functionary or office holder, is by monetary or other rewards such as the expectation of a job in the future, induced to take actions only which favour whatsoever provides the reward and thereby damages the group or organization to which the functionary belongs.<sup>12</sup> Corruption in Nigeria has remained a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of the society. Though many societies (including the developed and developing ones) are ordered on the bedrock and contagious base of corruption and once it matures, it progenies became the core of the citizens orientation. This invariably perhaps explains many developing nations' characteristics in their political experience especially in Nigeria. Put succinctly, the country Nigeria could have been one of the most prosperous nations in the world if the issue of corruption had not taken its root as Awojobi asserts, but rather the nation squandered her oil and mineral wealth, generated horrendously and today is listed as one of the world's most corrupt countries.<sup>13</sup> According to Tam David-West, this development actually re-echoed in the corrupt mismanagement of the nation's gains from oil sales especially during the Gulf War.<sup>14</sup>

A public office holder is said to be corrupt when he violates established rules for personal gains and abuses entrusted office for private benefit. This could be through the use of illegitimate force, bribery, extortion, fraud, embezzlement, contract inflation, negligence, theft, indifference or any other acts of misdemeanors.<sup>15</sup> This fraudulent behaviour and its resultant wasteful government spending mars good quality delivery, affects the formulation and implementation of any development goals and as a result retards development. The activities of corrupt public officers exacerbate deep institutional weaknesses and lead to inefficient economic, social, and political outcomes. Thus, public office corruption reduces economic growth, retards long-term foreign and domestic investments, enhances inflation, depreciates national currency, reduces capital expenditures for education and health at the detriment of increased running cost, misallocates talent to rent-seeking activities, distorts markets and the allocation of resources increase income inequality and poverty, reduces tax revenue and thereby impede quality delivery.<sup>16</sup>

### **Causes of Corruption**

Corruption in whatever form is a negation of ethical behavior or societal ethics described by Ogbuehi as the code of moral principles that sets standards of good or bad, right or wrong in one's conduct and thereby guides the behavior.<sup>17</sup> In Nigeria particularly, there are several factors that promotes corruption and the outstanding one of them is bad leadership. History has shown that no nation of the world grew and enjoyed steady development in virtually all spheres of its national life without experiencing good and selfless political leadership. This is largely because qualitative growth and development has always been an outcome of good governance. Commenting on the experience of the Nigerian

nation, the renowned novelist, Chinua Achebe, insisted that the root cause of the Nigerian predicament should be laid squarely at the foot of bad leadership. Achebe argued:

is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, climate, water, air, or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership.<sup>18</sup>

Historically, right from the First Republic to military intervention in the politics of Nigeria in 1966 to date none of the leaders that has ruled has been exonerated from corruption. Even the military themselves became blindly corrupt, recklessness to the detriment of the country's populace.<sup>19</sup>

The First Republic under the leadership of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister, and Nnamdi Azikwe, the President, was marked by widespread corruption. Government officials looted public funds with impunity. Federal Representative and Ministers flaunted their wealth with reckless abandon. The situation described above, among other factors, provided the pretext for a group of young middle-rank army officers to sack the Nigerian First Republic politicians from power through a coup d'état on 15th January 1966 on the ground of corruption. The General Aguiyi Thomas Ironsi military government that replaced the sacked civilian regime instituted a series of commissions of inquiry to investigate the activities of some government parastatals and to probe the widespread corruption that characterised the public service sector of the deposed regime. The report on the parastatals, especially the Nigeria Railway Corporation, Nigeria Ports Authority, and the defunct Electricity Corporation of Nigeria and Nigeria Airways, revealed that a number of ministers formed companies and used their influence to secure contracts. Moreover, they were found guilty of misappropriation of funds as well as disregarding laid down procedures in the award of contracts by parastatals under their Ministries.<sup>20</sup>

General Yakubu Gowon ruled the country at a time Nigeria experienced an unprecedented wealth from the oil boom of the 1970s. Apart from the mismanagement of the economy, the Gowon regime was enmeshed in deep-seated corruption. By 1974, reports of unaccountable wealth of Gowon's military governors and other public office holders had become the crux of discussion in the various Nigerian dailies. Thus, in July 1975, the Gowon administration was toppled by General Murtala Mohammed through a coup d'état. The coup of 1975, among other things, was an attempt to end corruption in the public service. General Murtala Mohammed began by declaring his assets and asking all government officials to follow suit. He instituted a series of probes of past leaders. The Federal Assets Investigation Panel of 1975 found ten of the twelve state military governors in the Gowon regime guilty of corruption. The guilty persons were dismissed from the military services with ignominy. They were also forced to give up ill-acquired properties considered to be in excess of their earnings.<sup>21</sup> In the same vein, the Belgore Commission of Inquiry was established to investigate the "Cement Armada." The Commission indicted the Gowon government of inflating contracts for cement on behalf of the Ministry of Defence for private profit at a great cost to the government. In its Report, the Commission noted that the Ministry of Defence needed only 2.9 million tons of cement at a cost of N52 million as against the 16 million metric tons of cement, it ordered, at a cost of N557 million.<sup>22</sup> Similar commissions of inquiry were constituted by the new state governments which resulted in the immediate dismissal of several corrupt officials, many of who were in turn ordered to refund the money they had stolen.

The Second Republic, under President Shehu Shagari, witnessed a resurgence of corruption. The Shagari administration was marked by spectacular government corruption, as the President did nothing to stop the looting of public funds by elected officials. Corruption among the political leaders was amplified due to greater availability of funds. It was claimed that over \$16 billion in oil revenues were lost between 1979 and 1983 during the reign of President Shehu Shagari. It became quite common, for federal buildings to mysteriously go up in flames, most especially just before the onset of ordered audits of government accounts, making it impossible to discover written evidence of embezzlement and fraud.<sup>23</sup> No politician symbolised the graft and avarice under Shagari's government more than his combative Transport Minister, Alhaji Umaru Dikko, who was alleged to have mismanaged about N4 billion of public fund meant for the importation of rice.

However, on 31st December 1983, General Muhammadu Buhari led a popular coup that again rescued the economy from the grip of corrupt politicians of the Second Republic. The 1983 coup was carried out with the aim of halting corruption and restoring discipline, integrity and dignity to public life. General Buhari's regime promised to bring corrupt officials and their agents to book. Consequently, state governors and commissioners were arrested and brought before tribunals of inquiry. The new Buhari regime, which scarcely showed respect for human rights in its bid to entrench discipline and sanity in public life, was toppled by the General Ibrahim Babangida in a bloodless inhouse coup on 27th August 1985. The next thirteen years saw no serious attempt to stop corruption. If anything, corruption reached an alarming rate and became institutionalized during Babangida's regime.

In the face of intense public opposition to his rule, General Babangida reluctantly handed the reins of government to a non-elected military-civilian Interim National Government on 26th August 1993 which was later ousted from power by the military under the leadership of General Sani Abacha on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1993. Abacha's regime only furthered the deep-seated corrupt practices, which already characterised public life since the inception of the Babangida regime. Under General Abacha, corrupt practices became blatant and systematic. General Abacha and his family alongside his associates looted Nigeria's coffers with reckless abandon. The extent of Abacha's venality seemed to have surpassed that of other notorious African rulers, such as Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire (now called the Democratic Republic of Congo). It was estimated that the embezzlement of public funds and corruption proceeds of General Abacha and his family amounted to USD 4 billion.<sup>24</sup> The corrupt nature and financial recklessness of the Babangida regime was detailed in the Okigbo Panel Report of 1994.

The 1994 Okigbo Panel Report on the Reorganisation and Reform of the Central Bank of Nigeria indicted former Military President, General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, former Head of State, late General Sani Abacha, and former Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, the late Alhaji Abdulkadir Ahmed, for mismanaging about \$12.4 billion oil windfall between 1988 and 1994. A summary of the panel's report submitted to the Federal Government revealed that General Ibrahim Babangida's regime conspired with top officials of the Central Bank of Nigeria to squander the entire fortune on unproductive or dubious projects.<sup>25</sup> As indicated in the Okigbo Report, in 1988, General Babangida authorised the dedication of crude oil of 65,000 barrels per day (bpd) for the finance of special priority projects including Ajaokuta Iron & Steel, Itakpe Iron Mining, and Shiroro Hydro-electric projects. The account was also to be used for external debt buy-back and the build-up of reserves. The quantity was subsequently increased to 105,000 barrels per day and in early 1994, to 150,000 barrels per day. In addition, a Stabilisation Account to receive the windfall of oil proceeds of the Gulf War and a Special Account for Mining Rights and Signature Bonus were opened. Altogether, \$12.4 billion was received into these accounts from 1988 to

June 1994, all of which were frittered away dubiously leaving only a balance of \$206 million as of 30th June 1994.<sup>26</sup>

Even in the year 1990, the nation was unable to account for the proceeds from petroleum exports up to the tune of US \$1.5 billion. When even in that same year the Apes Bank of the country, Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) recorded about 5 billion in oil revenue ironically, this did not go into the federation account as required by the revenue distribution mechanism. A year after, out of the two billion dollars the country realized from the sale of its equity in joint venture with Shell, one billion dollars had been spent for undocumented purposes.<sup>27</sup> The foregoing which is perhaps a semblance reflection of public expenditure management in Nigeria is one of mindless plunder of national wealth by the leaders. As thus, the government which is expected to curb corruption thrives most in government, wasting of resources, defeating all prospects of democracy and development. People see appointment into public office as a way of looting the treasury, hence no faith in public morality.

Be that as it may, being aware of the decades of systematic corruption perpetrated by the successive political leadership of Nigeria and the devastating effects it has had on the country in all ramifications of national life, the Obasanjo-led civilian government which was inaugurated on May 29, 1999 after sixteen years of military rule, strengthened existing anti-corruption laws and established two important anti-corruption institutions – the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) – to tackle the phenomenon of corruption in public and private life squarely. The ICPC was inaugurated on 29th September 2000 by the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo. The Commission was established to target corruption in the public sector, especially cases of bribery, gratification, graft, and abuse or misuse of office.<sup>28</sup> The EFCC, on the other hand, was established in 2003, partially in response to pressure from the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF), which named Nigeria among twenty-three non-cooperative countries frustrating the efforts of the international community to fight money laundering.<sup>29</sup>

However, despite its smokescreen stance to stamp out corruption, again, during the first four years of the Olusegun Obasanjo administration, federal ministers allegedly stole more than N23 billion from the public coffers. It was the case of a fish with a rotten head. An audit report released by Vincent Azie, acting Auditor-General of the Federation, showed that the amount represented financial frauds ranging from embezzlement, payments for jobs not done, over-invoicing, double-debiting, inflation of contract figures to release of money without the consent of the approving authority in ten major ministries. Rather than cautioning the ministers whose ministries were named in the fraud or invite the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) to further investigate the veracity of the alleged fraud, Vincent Azie was hastily retired by the Presidency for procedural offences.<sup>30</sup>

Political parties in Nigeria have become an embodiment of corruption. This is a sad development for Nigeria because political parties are the ideological powerhouse of civilian administration. On the contrary, political parties in Nigeria have been the main avenues for promoting corrupt practices in the country through godfatherism, extortion, to mention but a few. At the 2003 Special Convention of the ruling People Democratic Party (PDP), where the presidential flag bearer was chosen, more than N1 billion bribe was allegedly shared to delegates by the Obasanjo group on the ninth floor of the Nicon Hilton Hotel, Abuja. In the same manner, such occurred during the All Progressive Congress' (APC) 2014 National Convention when delegates were allegedly bribed in dollars to vote for a particular candidate to be the party's flagbearer for the 2015 Presidential Election. A corrupt ruling party undoubtedly would always produce a corrupt government; it is difficult to separate the legislators and the executives at the federal, state, and local councils from the cardinal ideology of their political parties.



If corruption in the 1990s was endemic, corruption since the return of democracy in 1999 has been legendary. Throughout the eight years presidency of President Olusegun Obasanjo, he was fully in charge of the petroleum ministry, where high-level corrupt practices took place with impunity. The over \$400 million invested on the Turn-Around Maintenance (TAM) and repairs of the refineries failed to yield any positive result, and the contractors awarded the contracts were never brought to book. Records have also shown that the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) is at the centre of major corrupt practices in the industry with regards to the operation of its finances, especially in respect of actual revenue realised from the sale of crude oil, and other petroleum resources, such as natural gas.

Furthermore, the report by the Revenue Mobilisation Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) indicated that 445,000 barrels of crude oil sold by the NNPC between January and July 2002 was not accounted for in its financial report. The report further indicated that within the seven-month period, there was a shortfall of N302 billion as undeclared revenue. The request by Haman Tukur, Chairman of RMAFC, to the Presidency to compel Jackson Gaius-Obaseki, former Group Managing Director of NNPC, to refund the remaining money into government's coffer was never heeded. More so, the joint panel of the National Assembly set up to probe the matter was also hindered by the Presidency and top hierarchy officials of the People Democratic Party on the ground that the probe would send negative signals abroad about corruption in Nigeria particularly the presidency where investigation into the matter indicted Hussaini Akwanga, who until December 4, 2003 was Nigeria's Minister for Labour and Productivity, Chief Sunday Michael Afolabi and Mahmud Shata, former Minister of Internal Affairs and Minister of State in the same Ministry respectively, R. O. Akerele, Permanent Secretary of the same Ministry of Internal Affairs, Okwesilieze Nwodo, former Governor of Enugu State and erstwhile secretary of the ruling People Democratic Party, Niyi Adelagun, a business partner of SAGEM S.A. in Nigeria and Jean-Pierre Delarue, the Regional Area Manager, Identification Systems of SAGEM S.A. It is now on the pages of history books that the huge sum released for the project that was not fully executed was divided among the suspected culprits.<sup>31</sup>

The National Identity Card scandal is another case of high profile corruption perpetrated by the top echelon of the nation's political leadership class. In 2001, the administration of Olusegun Obasanjo awarded the \$214 million National Identity Card project to SAGEM S.A., a French company, under controversial circumstances because the Nigerian Security Printing and Minting Company (NSPMC), which bid for the same contract at a lower rate, was not obliged. It was alleged that seven prominent public servants collaborated with SAGEM S.A. to scuttle the \$214million project.<sup>32</sup>

Another laudable factor that promotes corruption in Nigeria is the issue of self-aggrandizement among politicians. Many of the politicians elected were corrupt and even expected gratification from the corridor of power before passing any bill into law. The immediate past chairman of the House of Representatives on fuel subsidy probe, Honourable Farouk Lawan took the sum of \$620,000 from an oil magnate Chief Femi Otedola in a bid to protect and remove the name of the latter's company from the list of companies that have defrauded the government. Undue interference on the part of the politicians towards anti-corruption crusade and organs it took the politicians several months in the National Assembly before passing into law President Obasanjo's Anti-Corruption Bill.

One time Nigerian Senate President, Dr Chuba Okadigbo and the Senate Leader in the year 2000 according to the *TheNews* and *Tell Magazine*<sup>33</sup> described and used phrases like "the face of a liar" to them due to their corrupt practices as a result of the senate contract award scam which eventually led to their impeachment.<sup>34</sup> These same characteristics espalined the initial handling of the corrupt antecedents of the first (former) senate president

Chief Evans Enwerem. Not to also forget the impeachment of the erstwhile House of Representatives speaker Mrs Felicia Etteh due to contract renovation with about N680 million scam. Even the state governors were not esmepted from various corrupt practices. Many of them were being prosecuted after leaving office not on any other issue but on corruption.

Another issue was that of former Delta State Governor, James Onanefe Ibori jailed in the United Kingdom for corruption. Even the case of the immediate past House of Representatives speaker Honourable Dimeji Bankole and his deputy, Honourable Nefada is still pending in court charged for corruption up to the tune of N40 billion.

Falsification and forgery of certificate is also among other factors that promotes corruption in Nigeria. A former speaker, Alhaji Ibrahim Salisu Buhari of the House of Representatives was discovered to have forged and falsified his age. He claimed to have bagged a degree from the University of Toronto in Canada. The case tended to show the House of Representatives as a corrupt institution and sustainer of corruption and corrupt officials. Many top government functionaries were said to be forging their age in order not to retire on time as well as falsified their certificates in order to remain in power. This attitude of corruption gives a major setback to the country and deprived the country acceptability within the comity of nations as a morally upright nation or group of people.

Closely related to the above is also the factor of false assets declaration. Many of the public officials normally declared false assets before the code of conduct bureau, thus giving them access to corruptly enrich themselves. The current president of the Nigerian senate, Dr Bukola Saraki is facing trial at the Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT) over false assets declared while as Governor of Kwara State and as Senator from 2003 to 2011.

Poor economy also contributed to the factor that aided corruption in Nigeria, individual in high and low places struggle corruption as a way out of poverty or wretchedness. Taking undue advantage of their post, position and offices to embezzle public funds and divert public money. For instance as a result of poor remuneration a policeman or law enforcement agents in Nigeria accept bribes a times justification to this act has always been inadequate salaries, extended family problem, lateness in the payment of salaries as at when due and several others.

As a matter of fact, the level and rate of corruption under the administration of General Yakubu Gowon's regime came under public scrutiny when General Muritala Mohammed became the head of state and set up assets investigation panel to probe the government that served under the former. Invariably, the panel indicated ten (10) of the twelve (12) governors and subsequently had their assets confiscated worth well over N10 million (in 1976).<sup>35</sup> But in addition to this, the current nature of the Nigerian society paved way for the factor of unrivaled lust for wealth that aided corruption in the country. In fact people expect that after leaving office irrespective of your position, there should be numerous houses, cars, properties and many others for such individual. Generally, Nigerian society worship wealth and attached too much importance to wealth acquisition which in turn made people to be corrupt.

The most significant issue responsible underdevelopment of Nigeria is widespread corruption particularly by those entrusted with public offices. Their corrupt activities distort the process of calling for bids, the purpose of which is to select the best in terms of the price/quality ratio and if the selection process is skewed by bribe, the state is no longer in a position to assure the citizens of quality delivery but poorly constructed infrastructures built with second-rate materials at exorbitant prices.<sup>36</sup> Taking cognizance of this link between corruption in public offices, quality delivery and the development process in Nigeria, the scandalous findings by investigations of the spending in the Power Sector during the Umaru Yar' Adua administration should not be astounding. According to the report, "Well known



people collected tens of billions of Naira, some close to or even over a hundred billion from the Federal Government to execute critical projects in the sector and did absolutely nothing in return or 'just laid a few blocks here and there'.<sup>37</sup> Also, if the ten billion reportedly spent by the Obasanjo administration on Power project during his eight- year stay in office had been effectively and properly deployed, the electricity situation in the country would be much better today.

Thus Afri Network for Environment and Social Justice has argued that public finance theft do not merely represent static monetary amounts, it contains rather a potential for development that does not become realized<sup>38</sup>It can only be put to use when allowed to flow. The notion that these assets were stolen does not simply imply that a certain amount of Naira was absconded with. It means rather that a river of creative potential was perverted from its natural course, which was to be tapped into for investment in domestic infrastructures and other development purposes. Thus, "for every Naira corrupted of it creative energy to do good and catered away in foreign banks becomes putrefied as if it was locked away instead of remaining productive among the people. Every Naira of stolen assets represents quite literally a child listless with hunger, instead of thriving with vitality".<sup>39</sup> Altas has also pointed out that if there is corruption in public revenue collection, whether at the level of domestic taxation or customs, the State's resources will diminish and its capacity to contribute to the country's development through quality delivery will be reduced as hospitals, schools and water points will not be constructed and basic economic infrastructure will not be established or improved for better services.<sup>40</sup>

Corruption has also slimed the hope for quality assurance in governance because the politicians have turned unproductive by their corrupt activities ranging from failure to make a clear separation between what is public and what is private. This has the tendency to divert public resources for private gain and failure to establish a predictable framework for law and government behaviour in a manner that is conducive for development and bring about misallocation of resources and excessively narrow base and non-transparent decision making process.<sup>41</sup> When these features occur together, they create an environment that is hostile to development. In such circumstances, the authority of governments over their people tends to be progressively eroded reducing compliance with decisions and regulations. The government then tends to respond through populist measures or resorts to coercion and diversion of state resources to the security of its leaders. This escalates corruption and is injurious to a nation's socio-political development and quality delivery.

The leaders who Should have been encouraging and leading by examples of principled frugality or managing the resources optimally to achieve a common development need or exhorting the followers to a more equitable distribution of the scanty resources have gone beyond maximum corruption to outright looting of the National Treasury<sup>42</sup> The political office thus becomes an exclusive power club for which there is an intense struggle to get to with immunity to accountability and numerous privileges. Getting into government becomes the easiest road to richness instead of essential services to the public.

Thus, public office holders now use the opportunity given to them to cheat and defraud the people of the scarce resources that ought to have been channeled towards peace and political stability. This reduces economic growth, retards long-term foreign and domestic investments, enhances inflation, depreciates national currency, reduces expenditures for education and health, increases military expenditures, misallocates talent to rent-seeking activities, pushes firms underground, distorts markets and the allocation of resources, increases income inequality and poverty, reduces tax revenue, increases child and infant mortality rates and distorts the fundamental role of the government in the enforcement of contracts and protection of property.<sup>43</sup>

Obasanjo<sup>44</sup> has also acknowledged that corruption affects individuals, groups and the society and wreaks unquantifiable damage to all facets of Nigeria's corporate life; it causes loss of revenue to the government; undermines national development efforts, economic potentials and political stability erodes efficiency, effectiveness and productivity in the public service, and gives the country a bad international image leading to loss of investor confidence. Achebe<sup>45</sup> estimates that about 60% of Nigeria's wealth is consumed by corruption which he describes as a white-collar crime engaged in predominantly by the ministers, head of states apparatus and other senior public officers. It is a grossly under-reported crime and its economic costs to the nation far outweighs those of armed robbery and currency offences which often receive sensational attention and coverage by the police and the media. All these are antithetical to the ethos of leadership and are inhibitive of national development, especially in terms of the substitution of mediocrity for merit.<sup>46</sup>

### **Reducing Corruption in Nigerian Public Office**

Public office holders should be patriotic enough to hold public funds and property in trust for the country in order to effectively reduce corruption in public offices. Accountability and transparency in the interest of the general populace with proper management of the available resources must also be enthroned in order to solve the problems of corrupt political leaders and the attendant problems of political crisis and economic underdevelopment.<sup>47</sup>

Economic planners should also strive to reduce V income inequality as a strategy for reducing corruption. The juxtaposition of splendor and squalor in the society is also a causative factor in the decline in moral standards and a fundamental aspect of the challenge to the alleviation of poverty which in collaboration with affluence also breeds corruption. The poor are distressed by multiple problems ranging from insecurity, intimidation by individuals and state agents, and other psychological problems, to lack of access to clean water, nutritious food, good shelter, affordable and efficient health services, qualitative education as well as having to struggle to survive each day. In most cases, the unavailability of productive engagements push them to the streets, where they transform into further extensions of the very problems that propelled them into such conditions in the first place. These unfortunate persons easily become tools for stealing of ballot boxes, rioting, violence, prostitution and other nefarious activities by public office holders whose unethical activities degenerate the already grave condition of the poor. It is therefore clear that "where incomes are less unequally distributed the incidence of corruption is lower than where there is a high degree of inequality in income distribution".<sup>48</sup> Consequently, more welfarist economies tend to be less corrupt than capitalist or market-oriented, individualistic economies.

In a bid to reduce corruption, Aluko<sup>49</sup> argues that it may become imperative to monitor some rich and powerful public servants in the country, not just because their corrupt activities drain state resources more than that of the poor, but because the higher income earners are generally those who impede the very development programmes that they are paid to implement and thwart the people's hope for quality infrastructures. To make any significant impact in reducing corruption, the Obasanjo's slogan of there must be no sacred cows should not be a mere political rhetoric. It should be put into practice by prosecuting all known corrupt political heavy weights in the society. As Agabi notes "... *big men are the greatest criminals and except you go after the big criminals and bring them to book, the rate of crime may not reduce ... bring three or four of these big men to book, the rate of criminal activities would reduce*".<sup>50</sup>

Strengthening institutions should be a part of the strategies for reducing corruption as this will prevent manipulation by corrupt public office holders as was, in the established case of Adamawa 2003 gubernatorial elections between the incumbent, Boni Haruna and the

his opponent, Adamu Mu'azu' Modibbo. The claim of connivance by security forces and the manipulation of other state institutions by the incumbent, the open thumb printing of ballot papers by policemen in uniform, the inflation of electoral result, victimization of opposition's agents and voters, and other evils that have tailored election in Nigeria were substantially proven in a Judicial Panel.<sup>51</sup> Two cases of policemen thumb printing ballot boxes were cited. Abraham with service number 338850 photographed in the act at Duhu-Nayo polling unit of Madagali Local Government Area, and another policeman with service number 94157 doing the same at Mubi North Local Government Area after driving off opposition supporters.<sup>52</sup> The petitioners also established that civil servants employed by INEC as ad hoc electoral officials were partisan on the side of the incumbent. These government officials proved this by being members of "Civil Servants Boni/Haruna Solidarity Forum" and Movement of Post-Primary School Teachers for Obasanjo/Atiku and Boni/Haruna, while many other senior and corrupt public officials under the code name "Operation Deliver Your Ward" operated with the main objective of canvassing for the return of Boni Haruna in their localities.<sup>53</sup>

If corrupt institutional manipulations such as these are allowed to continue, poor elections, leadership crisis, underdevelopment and the resultant poor quality delivery will continue to mar the nation irrespective of the availability of sound speeches, economic theories and development programmes,<sup>54</sup> because in the words of Achebe<sup>55</sup>, the angels would not come from heaven to implement them. The civil service established Ethics, Codes and institutional values help to protect the institution's professionalism and integrity is a starting point in quality assurance and development in twenty-first century Nigeria. The civil service and other public institutions should be protected from unwarranted political interference. Such would not only be a protection against corruption but would also guarantee that goods and service would be delivered efficiently. Thus civil service reform is one of the most important aspects in the fight against corruption.

Anti-corruption programmes should also regard the mobilization of the civil society as crucial to achieving success. In dealing with the problems of corruption, the best position for the civil society is in a coalition consisting of the government, the private sector and civil society. All three have to be involved for the fight against corruption to ensure legitimacy, effectiveness and sustainability with each sector bringing in its special experience. Learning from each other's experience in the first place will help to define the problem and to see the underlying issues more sharply, which in turn will enable the development of counter strategies. Civil society actors should watch how state officials use their powers. They should raise public concern about any abuse of power. They should lobby for access to information, including freedom of information laws, and rules and institutions to control corruption.<sup>56</sup>

This constitutes a second important function of civil society: to expose the corrupt conduct of public officials and lobby for good governance reforms. Even where anti-corruption laws and bodies exist, they cannot function effectively without the active support and participation of the civil society. The civil society can also promote political participation. Nongovernmental organizations can do this by educating people about their rights and obligations as democratic citizens, and encouraging them to listen to election campaigns and vote in elections. These organizations can help to develop the other values of democratic life: tolerance, moderation, compromise, and respect for opposing points of view. Without this deeper culture of accommodation, democracy cannot be stable. These values cannot simply be taught; they must also be experienced through practice.

Civil society must be involved as a constructive partner and advocate for democracy and human rights training. The civil society is an arena for the expression of diverse interests, and one role for civil society organizations is to lobby for the needs and concerns of their members, as women, students, farmers, environmentalists, trade unionists, lawyers,

doctors, and so on.<sup>57</sup> Non-governmental organizations and interest groups can present their views to the legislature by contacting the individual members and testifying before legislative committees.

### **Recommendation**

In order to uphold development goals, the Nigerian political class must find their humanity and the courage to combat corruption because responsible administration which respects the rules of democracy and creates a favourable environment for economic and social development is a basic prerequisite for combating corruption and enhancing quality delivery in the country. The Nigerian government should also try and implement an innovative and workable anti-corruption policy by combining and taking advantage of the development of information technology with a systematic approach to reduce or if possible expunge corruption. It should make effort to enhance transparency by rooting out the source of corruption and ensuring that those Public officers guilty of corrupt practices are brought to book. The nation's anti-corruption agencies (EFCC, CCB/CCT and ICPC) must be strengthened.

Good and solid democratic system of government should be entrenched based on good leadership by example. A responsible, corrupt free leadership should be at the helm of affairs someone who will not mind whose ox is gored in his effort to fight the hydra-headed monster called corruption. Further, a good judicial system should be in place that will not slow down the process of prosecuting corrupt officials and sanctioned them accordingly in order to serve as deterrent to others.

The government should also introduce an anti-corruption index to encourage healthy competition among its citizenry by introducing a numerical system that quantifies the integrity of Public Officers. Such efforts can only be successful if the government takes full advantage of the advancement of information technology with the general objectives of deriving an unbiased and open assessment. A government devoted and committed to expel corruption cannot be over-emphasized in this regard. It must be fully committed and determined to concentrate on the task of promoting a more open and transparent public office.

An overwhelming and positive support of the civil society for the government reforms is also very crucial to the success of any reform. The government should be able to actively enlist the support and cooperation of the citizenry at the grassroots in its anti-corruption drive. While ensuring at the same time, an active and proper communication between the government and the citizenry.

Office automation should also be implemented in order to ensure efficiency and transparency of administrative procedures to enhance quality assurance and development in Nigeria in the twenty-first century.

For law enforcement agencies to stop breaking the law or taking the law into their hands an overhaul action should be taken in order to reform the Nigerian Police Force. Above all, we do not need the "docility of followership". The Nigerian citizenry must be up to their responsibility.

### **Conclusion**

The most tragic effect of corruption on Nigeria has been the failure of the country to attain its economic potentials. Despite its substantial natural and human resources, Nigeria remains desperately poor due to bad management of its wealth by successive corrupt governments. Today, Nigeria is one of the poorest countries in the world. Its unadjusted GNP per capita of \$300 leaves it in 164th position among other countries in 1999. The per capita GNP PPP (purchasing power parity) figure of \$820 looks better at first glance but it ranks

199th out of the 209 countries covered in the World Bank's 2000 World Development Report.<sup>58</sup> In 2010, Nigeria's GDP per capita (PPP) of \$2,365 ranked as 138th in the world out of the 180 countries, while the GNI per capita (PPP) of \$2,160 left the country in the 172nd position out of the 215 countries listed in the World Development Indicators Database.<sup>59</sup>

In the final analysis, the greatest challenge facing Nigeria as a country is the problem of poverty and that of underdevelopment. Put succinctly, long years of bad leadership and even dictatorial governance has left the country badly damaged coupled with the endemic issue of corruption. This paper concludes that moral and financial indiscipline and other manifestations of corruption must be significantly reduced in order to get close to the 21<sup>st</sup> century development goals and ensure quality infrastructures in Nigeria. The proliferation of corrupt public officers is politically destabilizing. It also affects investment, economic growth, and government expenditure choices. Bribery and corruption, the culture of late payment, delays or refusal of payment for services already rendered do scare away investors. Thus, corruption discourages honest effort and valuable economic activities; and it breeds inefficiency and nepotism. With the advent of the President Muhammadu Buhari<sup>60</sup> led-administration and its stance against corruption, let us keep our fingers crossed.

### Endnote

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