

## Media Crusade Against Corruption In Ghana's Fourth Republic (2004-2012)

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### **Abstract**

Corruption, which has become a household word on the lips of almost everybody in Ghana, may simply be understood as the misuse of one's public office for benefits either for himself or herself or some other groups the person has affinity with. The role of the media in fighting corruption in a democracy is well known. Media exposure of corrupt officials enables the law enforcement agencies to arrest and prosecute culprits and this serves as a deterrent to other would-be offenders. Over the years, the corruption menace and its adverse effects on development have been of great concern to many people. In their efforts to combat corruption, successive Ghanaian governments have resorted to various means, including confiscation of property, imprisonment and even execution of convicted corrupt public officials. These measures, in spite of their punitive nature failed to deter Ghanaians from indulging in corrupt practices. In the light of the crucial role of the media in the fight against corruption, coupled with the expansion of the frontiers of free speech and the repeal of the obnoxious criminal libel and seditious laws, one would have thought the stage was set for an effective media crusade against corruption in the country. But, unfortunately this is not the case. The question then is: what has accounted for the lack of bite of the Ghanaian media in the fight against corruption despite its vibrancy and strength in Ghana's Fourth Republic? This paper seeks to achieve three objectives. First, to contribute to the ongoing debate on whether the media can be used as an effective instrument in the fight against the corruption phenomenon, whose roots are penetrating deep into the society. Second, to identify some of the high profile corruption cases in Ghana and government's indifference towards addressing them. Finally, the study attempts to establish why the government and the state institutions have not been performing their role as expected of them in the crusade. The study is anchored to the agenda setting theory of the media. To achieve the set objectives, articles on corruption covered by three private newspapers in Ghana, which have been at the forefront of the fight against the corruption menace, were picked for the study. It was evident the media has played its role in exposing corruption, but the lackadaisical responses of government and the failure of the appropriate state institutions to act, make the phenomenon blossom. There is the urgent need for both government and the relevant institutions to demonstrate serious commitment to crusade against this awful menace.

**Key words:** agenda-setting, fraud, lackadaisical, awful, nefarious, propaganda, sloganeering

### **Introduction**

The phenomenon of corruption has become one of the greatest threats to the survival of democratic rule in Africa. In Ghana, efforts have been made by successive governments to deal with this social scourge. These have included anti-corruption slogans and posters at public offices, code of conduct for public officials, establishment of commissions of enquiry, imprisonment and even execution of convicted corrupt officials.

These measures, notwithstanding, corruption has not abated in the Ghanaian society. For instance, after the fall of the government of the Convention People's Party (CPP), the regime that assumed the reigns of government, that is, the National Liberation Council (NLC) established more than forty commissions of enquiry, all to investigate corruption in Ghana (Vine 1975: xi). In recent times, corruption perception index published by the Ghana Charter of Transparency International- Ghana Integrity Initiative (GII) - confirms that the canker is still widespread in all sectors of public life (GII, 2008).

At the moment, public accountability, which is an essential ingredient in any democracy's long-term viability, seems to be at its lowest ebb in Ghana, thus increasing the incidence of corruption in the country. Ironically, some of the anti-corruption bodies, particularly the judiciary and the police whose responsibilities, *inter alia*, are to assist in combating this menace, appear to have either lost their steam in the fight against the canker or have even been deeply embroiled in the phenomenon. What is more disturbing is that the media which is constitutionally enjoined to monitor and expose acts of wrongdoing, including corruption, as a social responsibility, seems handicapped and incapacitated, regrettably, through compromises with suspected corrupt officials. This has greatly affected the fight to reduce the menace in this Republic.

It is against this background that this paper seeks to find what has accounted for this growing tide of corruption in the country despite the vibrancy and strength of the Ghanaian media.

### **Meaning of Corruption**

Like any concept in the humanities, the term corruption defies a single definition. But in all the various definitions, the bottom line is that the phenomenon of corruption involves the unlawful use of public office in pursuit of private interest. This explanation is in tune with what has been given by the World Bank as "the abuse of public office for private gains" (Quoted in Gyimah-Boadi 2001: 2). This paper adopts the World Bank's definition on corruption and also considers only the phenomenon of corruption as it happens in the public sector.

The World Bank has noted that one of the key institutions necessary for the fight against corruption is the media. It views the media as not only responsible for creating awareness about acts of corruption in the society, but also helps in exposing it. But, the media, according to the World Bank, can best perform these roles only when certain conditions are fulfilled. The first is the freedom that ought to be given to the media in order to perform its duties effectively without any form of control or impediment in its ways.

Second, there must also be journalists who have the zeal and are committed to investigate and expose acts of corruption. Such journalists, according to the World Bank, need to be given protection by the state so as to ensure effective performance of their duties.

According to the World Bank there are two broad benefits that could be derived when media performs the above-mentioned roles. These are the tangible and intangible benefits. Touching on the tangible benefits, the World Bank argued that the effective operation of the media will go a long way to expose corrupt public officials. It cited examples of countries such as the Philippines and Thailand where politicians and public officials have lost their jobs following media reports against them. To the World Bank, a media which is able to do hard hitting and detailed stories regularly, apart from exposing corrupt officials, is not only able to reinforce the work of anti-corruption institutions but also provide the basis for such institutions to launch formal investigations.

Regarding intangible benefits, the World Bank held the view that though the impact of journalism on corruption cannot be felt directly, the general effects of media exposures and education on corruption, act as a check on corruption that would otherwise flourish (World Bank 2004: 1-5). On her part, Gadzekpo wondered how development could occur in Africa if there is no critical press to check undemocratic behaviour. She regretted that, when the press exposes corruption, incompetence and waste, they are tagged as adversarial. In her opinion, this function enables the media to contribute their quota towards ensuring effective, transparent and accountable governance. She stressed the need for the press to play a key role in the fight against problems like corruption and injustice in society. She debunked arguments against the press' watchdog role, arguing that, it is not the critical and investigative press that is the cause of Africa's underdevelopment but rather, vices like corruption, abuse of power and bad government policies. She said for Africa's development to be realized, it is necessary that the press strengthen its watchdog role (Gadzekpo 1996: 15-18).

Writing under the sub-theme, "Discursive Style and the Genre of Scandal", Hasty discusses how the Ghanaian media contributed towards the fight against corruption in the early 1990s. She noted that soon after the repeal of the *Newspaper Licensing Law* in 1992 (Newspaper Licensing Law 1985 (PNDCL211)) by the then PNDC government, the private press girded their loins together and waged a constant crusade against corruption, particularly in the public domain. As was the case, most front pages of the private newspapers were dominated by corruption stories, all aimed at exposing the government of the day. This aspect of journalism became fashionable, particularly among newspapers like the *Free Press* and *The Independent* who were blaming the acts of corruption on the illegal acquisition of wealth and ostentatious lifestyles of ministers of state (Hasty 2005: 138-139).

### **Statement Of The Problem**

Government, civil society organizations and voluntary associations claim to make frantic efforts at fighting corruption in Ghana, yet the incidence continues to thrive. At the forefront of the crusade is the media. Ex-President J.A. Kufuor claimed to have no evidence to prosecute officials in his government against whom corruption allegation were levelled. His successor, J.E.A. Mills, promised during his campaign rallies that even newspaper publication will be enough evidence to prosecute government officials against

whom corruption allegations are made. During the regime of the latter, media reports including video evidence showing public officers indulging in illegal acts were produced, yet no action was taken. The question that agitates the minds of many citizens and anti-corruption crusaders is what needs to be done next? Both government and state institutions have not helped much. Now the media has played its role by exposing corrupt officials but government and state institutions have failed to act. How then can the fight against the menace succeed?

### **Methodology**

The discussion in this paper was drawn mainly from secondary sources comprising information obtained from private newspapers used for the study. Information from journals and textbooks on the topic were also used to supplement those obtained from the newspapers.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Ghanaian media has played and continues to play a crucial role in bringing to light corruption related issues in order for the government to deal with them. Governments have so many issues to consider so when the media, which is regarded as the fourth estate of the political realm, highlights on any issue to receive public attention, the expectation is that government will pick it up and act on it. This brings into focus the question of agenda setting, the theory that will be used to guide this study.

### **Agenda-Setting Theory**

The word 'agenda' is ordinarily understood to mean a list, plan, or an outline of issues to be considered. The basic principle underlying the agenda setting theory is that the media, in the discharge of their duty of providing education and information to the public determines which of the information they want the public to see, read or hear, by placing emphasis on them. Governments do not have a formal list of items on their table to be considered. They select from the myriad of problems that compete for the limited attention span of policy makers, which they feel compelled to act on them. When governments begin to act on issues it has previously ignored, the issue is said to have become part of the political agenda. There is no single factor that can stimulate new thinking about issues that attract attention of governments. It is however, an undisputable fact that the media plays a prominent role in elevating issues from their parochial arena to receive the attention of policy makers. Agenda setting in this context thus, refers to the entire set of items before all the institutions of government for consideration at any given time. Viewed from this angle, the agenda setting theory simply refers to the issues the media considers or acts upon at a point in time and which ultimately become important subjects for public consideration. Under this theory, the attention that the media attaches to issues that it harps on is determined by the amount of coverage that is time and space, allotted to such issues in the electronic and print media respectively. The media may not at all times succeed in telling the people what to think, but they succeed in telling them what to think about (Janda, Berry and Goldman, 2000; Wilson, 2006; DeFleur and Dennis 1998: 269-270); Severin and Tankard, 1988; McCombs, 1986; McCombs and Shaw, 1993).

How does this theory apply to the Ghanaian situation? Article 41 sections (e) and (f) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, stipulates that: “the exercise and enjoyment of rights and freedoms is inseparable from the performance of duties and obligations, and accordingly, it shall be the duty of every citizen – (e) to work conscientiously in his/her lawfully chosen occupation (f) to protect and preserve public property and expose and combat misuse and waste of public funds and property”. By this provision, it means that in addition to educating, an informing the public as well as monitoring government’s actions and inactions, the media is also required to expose and combat abuse of public funds. This requirement of the media could also be interpreted as a function of the media towards the fight against corruption.

So, for the media to live up to this constitutional requirement, it is important for the media to put corruption high on its agenda and also focus public attention on it. In fact, the continuous exposure and education on corrupt practices by the media undoubtedly engender the following effects. Firstly, it creates the needed awareness of the problem for the appropriate solution to be found. Secondly, hard-hitting stories on corruption by the media do not only contribute to re-enforcing the work of other anti-corruption institutions, but also equip such institutions with the necessary information to undertake formal investigation into such corrupt practices. Sometimes, media exposure on corruption leads to the dismissal or forced resignation of corrupt public officials.

### **An Overview Of The Government’s Fight Against Corruption**

The fight against corruption is not a recent one. Successive governments in Ghana made some frantic efforts to wage onslaught against corruption in the country. The first President, Kwame Nkrumah started with the slogan “one man, one car”. This was followed by the “one man, one house” slogan crafted by Jerry John Rawlings in the days of his military rule. President Kufuor in the 2000s also came out with the “zero tolerance for corruption” cliché. In the late 1970s, eight senior military officers, including three former heads of state, were executed for their alleged involvement in corrupt deals. In the early 1980s, persons suspected of indulging in corrupt practices were subjected to investigations by the Citizen’s Vetting Committee (CVC), National Investigations Committee (NIC) and public tribunals. All these measures did not suffice to eliminate corruption in the system as the canker ravages on and even assumes relatively new dimensions. Legislations have been enacted in Ghana’s Fourth Republic to establish institutions to investigate and punish corrupt officials. These include the Serious Fraud Office (SFO) now the Economic and Organized Crime Office (EOCO), the Office of Public Accountability (OPA) and the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHIRAJ) as well as the passage of the Public Procurement Law. The existence of these laws and institutions notwithstanding, the rate of corruption in the country continues to soar (Brako, 2011). Is it the case that the legislative measures are not biting enough?

### **Selected Cases Of High Profile Corruption In Ghana’s Fourth Republic**

With the advent of the Fourth Republic, which commenced on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1992, the Ghanaian media has launched a vibrant crusade against corruption by exposing high profile corruption cases involving public officials to be dealt with. The ensuing paragraphs bring to light how the media unravelled some of the high profile corruption

cases, the personalities involved and how they were dealt with by government in the Fourth Republic.

### **Alhaji Moctar Musa Bamba's Episode**

The September 15, 2004 edition of the *Ghanaian Chronicle* unravelled corruption allegation involving Alhaji Moctar Musa Bamba, who was a leading member of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and was appointed Deputy Minister for Presidential Affairs during Kufuor regime. The said minister issued a letter on the letter head of office of the President of the Republic to a Ghanaian businessman resident in Austria introducing him to be assisted to secure a visa ostensibly to organise the Austrian Branch of the NPP. Incidentally, the United Nations Information Office in Accra had also received complaint and began investigations on human trafficking and visa fraud regarding the said Deputy Minister and his gang. This incident is a clear case of abuse of office as the Minister's action constituted an abuse of government facility for a purely political gain. When this story unfolded and tended to soil the image of the government, the President asked the Minister to resign. While accepting his resignation, the President assured the public that the government will not interfere with the work of the police in conducting investigation into the matter. With the assurance from the President, the public expectation was that the matter was going to be put before the court soon after the police had concluded their investigation. Most unfortunately however, nothing became of it and the matter died a natural death.

### **The Cocoa Smuggling Episode**

The *New Crusading Guide* published the shocking revelation in its April 8, 2010 edition under a banner headline "I Saw the End before We Started". The story exposed the rot at the country's western borders involving officials of the security agencies comprising the Police, Military, Customs, Excise and Preventive Service (CEPS) and the National Security (Castle Annex), assisting smugglers to smuggle cocoa to the neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire to sell at a higher price. The ace investigative journalist, Anas Aremeyaw Anas, who went undercover by using hiding cameras captured members of these security agencies committing this heinous crime against the state. The officials aided the smugglers in crossing borders with bags of cocoa by finding suitable paths and contacts to enable them perpetrate the act. This was done in exchange for bribe money. It is shocking to note that some of the security officials were from the National Security, who were mandated to fight this very crime by co-ordinating the activities of other anti-smuggling security officers, were neck deep in the smuggling spree. They used the very resources that were provided them by the state to facilitate their work to rather assist in the smuggling. The smugglers had a field day as the security officials on duty at the border posts looked on as taxi cabs and motor bikes loaded with bags of cocoa crossed the border into Cote d'Ivoire unimpeded

In addition to that, cocoa buying magnates from the Cote d'Ivoire were also allowed entry into Ghana where they bribed farmers with gifts so that they were able to buy cocoa from them at lower prices for resale at higher market prices in Cote d'Ivoire and thereby realising huge profits. The smuggling activities was not limited to cocoa produce alone, but extended to cover fertilizers which were to be sold at subsidised prices to Ghanaian farmers. This fertilizer subsidized scheme was introduced by the Government of Ghana to make prices of the input affordable for farmers to boost their yields. The input officials

of this scheme diverted the fertilizers meant for Ghanaian farmers to Cote d'Ivoire for sale while shortages were recorded in Ghana.

The investigations revealed that instead of fighting criminals, the security forces rather aided in the crime by providing the smugglers with vital information that will enable them to perpetrate the crime with ease. They provided directions regarding which routes to use and the best areas to cross the border and as well provided links to contact officials at the border posts and other relevant contact officials who could be of help to the smugglers even at the prohibited areas. It is on record that even personnel of the Local Buying Companies (LBCs) like Amajaro, Diaby and Transroyal were also involved in the smuggling of the cocoa beans to Cote d'Ivoire in order to get a higher price. The produce was bought per bag at ₵138 (which was later increased to ₵150) from the Ghanaian farmers for resale in Cote d'Ivoire at ₵173. It is interesting to mention that this smuggling activity was not gender sensitive as women joined the fray perhaps due to its lucrative nature. Three years on the case is still in court.

### **The Tema Port Scandal**

In another publication by the *New Crusading Guide* dated February 25 2010, the ace journalist in question, Anas Aremeyaw Anas, exposed another scandal involving officials of the Customs, Exercise and Preventive Service (CEPS) receiving bribe from shippers at the Tema Port. The report on this corruption allegation in itself was not new at all as oceans of them abound in the news archives in the past. What was new and made the story sensational however, was the use of video technology to identify the culprits. Bribery as Boachie-Danquah (2001:108) has noted, almost always occurs in obscurity. The scandal at Tema port took several forms. It ranged from over-invoicing and under-invoicing of imports and exports to dupe the state in the payment of customs and exercise duties; the use of the Port as the final destination for stolen luxury vehicles mostly from Canada and the use of Free Export Zone (FEZ) custom duty payment exemption forms to clear cargo meant for private individual persons. Others include false description of cargo to avoid paying taxes; the false declaration of transit cargo as cargo meant to be delivered in Ghana and the brazen clearance of cargo without paying duties. Like the previous episodes, no serious punitive action has been taken by government yet and these nation wreckers walk about as free men.

### **The Rot At The Electricity Company of Ghana**

The 8-month undercover investigation by the star journalist, Anas Aremeyaw Anas, brought to light massive corruption, naked stealing and maladministration at the Electricity Company of Ghana (ECG) leading to loss of millions of Ghana Cedis by the organization. In the story carried by the *New Crusading Guide* on January 25, 2012 the journalist stated that there were over a thousand and one ways by which fraudulent individuals and organization with the active connivance of ECG staff to dupe both the nation and domestic power suppliers. According to the story, some of the companies and individuals, most of whom are fabulously rich and financially sound, influence some ECG staff with bribes to tamper with electricity meters to malfunction such that they will produce low and inaccurate consumption figures. Others also sought the assistance of the company's staff to by-pass consumption that is, tapping electricity directly from the mains or the low tension poles and thereby enjoying free power supply. Some other companies also paid paltry sums of money to some ECG officials who allowed their bills to pile up for years. After a few years, they fictitiously folded up their organizations and

their bills declared as bad debts by the Company. Not long afterwards, the said organizations moved their machinery and operations to new locations under different company names and the cycle continues.

In other instances too, officials of ECG wilfully created artificial shortages of pre-paid meters just to make the grounds fertile for them to exploit by extorting monies from applicants for the meters. It must be noted that the pre-paid metering system was introduced by the government to solve the problem of non-payment of bills. The nefarious activities perpetrated by these corrupt ECG staff had grossly undermined the good intentions of government to introduce the pre-paid metering system. The story went further to list some of the well-resourced organizations which deliberately refused to pay their bills and accumulated millions of debts which the ECG staff looked on as the Office of the President – ₵675, 805.55; State House (Parliament) – ₵635, 781.31; Police Headquarters - ₵393, 736.65; Ghana Water Company – ₵617, 105.51 and Ministry of Finance - ₵524, 924.67. Other corporate institutions included Vodafon – ₵886, 814.15; M.T.N. ₵M.T.N 349, 811.19; Airtel ₵ 56,232.48; University of Ghana ₵4,388,500.63; Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology ₵ 2, 981, 228.93; University of Cape Coast ₵ 1, 871, 556.40; ECOBANK ₵320, 275. 56; La Palm Royal Beach ₵238,621.89; Movenpick ₵577,631.07 and Vienna City ₵44,435.14.

As usual, governments attitude towards this serious crime has been nothing shot of lackadaisical since no action has so far been taken against these defaulting companies.

### **Findings/Recommendation**

The study makes a number of findings. First, it was evident that past presidents of Ghana have paid lip service to the fight against corruption. They practically do very little or nothing at all to punish officials for engaging in corrupt deals. For example, after the Tema Port scandal, President J.E.A. Mills only engaged in angry harangues and exhortations directed at the Customs officials and that was the end of it. Ex-President J.A. Kufuor also on the visa fraud profoundly also assure the public that the culprit was going to be put before the court and that the government will not interfere with the police investigations into the matter and that was the last time something was heard about it.

Secondly, the study found that state institutions that have the power to prosecute or try corruption allegations cases either show no interest in such matters or pressure is brought to bear on them from the powers that be to abandon any action being taking on them.

Thirdly, it came to light that members of the executive shield public officials caught for indulging in such negative practices from facing prosecution.

Fourthly, the court and other institutions that are mandated to try such cases are also too weak to deal with corruption cases involving “special people” such as ministers of state.

Again, laws on corruption and their corresponding punishment are not biting enough to deter would-be perpetrators of corrupt acts. This is evident in the frequent adjournment of such cases in court and the release of arrested officials who are facing trial on charges of corruption.

To actually win the fight against the menace, the anti-corruption laws must be strengthened and the appropriate institutions re-structured and re-positioned so as to be able to handle corruption cases competently and punish culprits regardless of their status.

Again, the punishment for corruption should be made punitive. For example, if the culprit is a pensionable official, he/she should be made to lose his/her entitlements if he/she is found guilty.

Politicians who are also found culpable on corruption charges should be banned from holding public office for life and their properties confiscated to the state.

Furthermore, if it is a bribery, extortion or kickback, the culprit should be made to refund the amount involved plus 50 per cent interest so as to make corruption unattractive.

All these should be made in addition to the dismissal of the affected officers. Government must tackle corruption head-on by resourcing the anti-corruption institution. In addition, the government must take its hand off so that the appropriate institutions can deal with the issue appropriately.

### **Concluding**

The canker of corruption has over the years risen to astronomical heights and assumed different dimensions in the country. It is wrecking the nation as it contributes to the depletion of the national kitty. The media in Ghana have contributed their quota by launching a fierce onslaught against the canker, but weak institutions charged with the responsibility of dealing with the menace, ineffective laws, weak enforcement of laws, government's lackadaisical attitude towards corruption cases have all contributed to fester the growth of the social, economic and political menace. So many of such cases linger in the country's courts worsening by frequent legal manoeuvrings and adjournments. In most cases too, governments through the Attorney General's Department shows no interest in prosecuting such cases and leading them to die natural death. It is evident that in all the corruption cases reviewed, there were patrons and clients. The patrons being government officials and those mandated by the state either to collect taxes, keep guard at the borders or enforce the law. They are usually, the beneficiaries of the proceeds from the corrupt deals.

Corruption has also become so attractive because the laws are not punitive enough. Culprits, usually the patrons, when exposed are only given a sack, sometimes they are demoted or transferred and made to go with their booty. This makes the incidence very attractive and lucrative, wining a lot of otherwise patriot or honest people into its fold. The media is playing its role by exposing corrupt cases. It is up to the government, the appropriate institutions and agencies to act by dealing with the culprits. It is however, regrettable to note that the patrons themselves use their position to influence institutions charged with the mandate to handle such cases. The net effect of this behaviour is that it renders the institutions ineffective while at the same time emboldens the clients to continue to perpetrate their nefarious acts.

The fight against corruption is not won by propaganda or sloganeering-Zero Tolerance for Corruption, one man, one house, one man, one car, probity and accountability and the like. Neither is it won by paying lip service to the crusade. To succeed, government must be bold to deal ruthlessly with its own (ministers, appointees and other party functionaries) members of the public when found culpable. In addition, government must avoid interfering in the work of anti-corruption institutions and bodies to enable them perform their duties efficiently and effectively. Existing anti-corruption laws must also be applied to the letter, while new ones are introduced to address emerging challenges of the time.

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