

An Ethical Evaluation of Corruption and Governance in the Politics of Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the effects of corruption on politics and governance in Nigeria as they are played against the rules of morality. This makes the fight against corruption and the quest for good governance in Nigeria to attract curiosity. The paper established that the issue of corruption and governance cannot be alienated from each other because good governance abhors corruption, as corrupt regimes would not be interested in promoting good governance. The research adopted an expository and analytical method of investigation in order to picture the underlying factors that facilitate the spread of corruption. The expository method was employed to uncover the different forms of corruption that are carried out within the schemes of politics and governance in Nigeria, while the analytic method was used to examine the situation as presented. Based on the finding, it discovered that corruption negatively affects good governance human capital formation, which is the most important input in the process of economic development. It also weakens fair distribution of resources and other progressive economic developmental strategies. The paper, therefore, advocates for the exploration and engagement of stringent anti-corruption strategies against corruption and bad governance. This can be done by strengthening the anti-corruption policies such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) which have been put in place for this very purpose. Consequent upon this, recommendations were provided to chart the way forward.

Key words: Corruption, Ethics, Evaluation, Governance, Politics

Introduction

The account of the effects of corruption in politics and governance in Nigeria has been variously discussed by many scholars. However; there is still the need to continue to promote popular governance and hope at the moment while we make collective efforts to fight against these corrupt practices. We already have in place an anti-corruption policy and a number of agencies to check mate corrupt practices such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) to compliment some anti-corruption institutions like the judicial system to control the excesses of the numerous corrupt politicians, public office holders, oil and bank executives etc. Similarly, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an organization responsible for combating money laundering and financing of terrorism had facilitated the recovery of millions of naira retrieved for government and the private sectors both within and outside Nigeria. In spite of these efforts, corruption thrives as a major challenge of governance in Nigeria. Corruption has affected human moral instinct as an important factor in production which can lead to transformation and economic development. It is capable of weakening tax revenue administration and can lead to tax evasion and improper exemptions. Corruption may cause increase in the running cost of governance as well as divert available resources for other uses resulting to low budget for education and health spending. This study has critically evaluated corruption and its negative effects on governance and the Nigerian citizens. The research presents how corruption has eaten into the fabrics of the society due to high level of moral decay. The work evaluates the concept of corruption, the causes of corruption, the effects of corruption and how corruption can be handled. Consequent upon this, the paper submits that ethical teaching be upheld in shaping the morals of the people as key measure in the struggle to eradicate this cankerworm called corruption.

Conceptualizing Corruption: The word corruption is variously conceived; “it literally refers to lose value or to become putrid and useless, or lose of purity and integrity.”¹ Corruption is seen as, “the use of public office for private advantage.”² This is however, not always widely perceived as same in some societies corruption particularly where an individual who is making personal gain simultaneously makes positive contribution to the society. Here, no necessary contradiction is placed between private gains which at the same time could be used to contribute to the general good of the citizens of such a society. They see such actions as acceptable and just. Considering the conflict that may arise between an abstract definition of corruption and its application to a complex real world, “some writers have distinguished between what can crudely be called good, bad and ambiguous corruption.”³ Adeniyi captures it correctly when he described corruption as, “an act in context which involves redesigning the system and legalizing the appropriate actions of people in it. However, actions that unambiguously harm the society are such acts that should be treated as corrupt and criminal. Corruption entails the misuse of public resources or power for private gain, “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”.⁴

Corruption and Corrupt practices and can be discussed within two theoretical concepts:

- i. **Principal agent theory:** The Principal-agent theory conceptualizes corruption as a series of interactions and relationships that co-exist within and outside public bodies.

It emphasizes the rational choices that take place in individual incidents of corrupt behaviours. A principal-agent problem exists, “when one party to a relationship who is the

1 Mark E. Warren, “What Does Corruption Mean in a Democracy?” *American Journal of Political Science*, 2, (2004), Pg. 328.

2 Dzugba, A. *Contemporary Ethics*, (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Limited, 2007), Pg. 80.

3 Dzugba, A. *Contemporary Ethics*, Pg. 207.

4 Adeyemi A.F. *Introducing Ethics: Trends, Problems and Perspectives*. (Calabar: Jochrissam Publishers, 2006), Pg. 236.

principal requires a service of another party (the agent) but the principal lacks the necessary information to effectively monitor the agent's performance".⁵ The asymmetrical information between the principal and the agent creates power imbalance between the two and makes it difficult to ensure compliance. "This theoretical perspective helps to understand corruption across sectors like the police, customs, procurement, service delivery."⁶ The principal-agent theory sees corruption exclusively as, "an agent problem, with the principal's inability to play effective monitoring or oversight role, mostly as a result of lack of proper information".⁷ This suggests that, in cases where corruption is systemic, and where there are low levels of social and political trust, it may be more useful to think of corruption in terms of a collective action problem rather than as a principal-agent one.

ii. The Collective action Theory: Collective action approach indicates that, "all stakeholders including rulers, bureaucrats and citizens alike, work to maximize their interests."⁸ Here, the rewards and costs of corruption depend on how many other individuals in the same society are expected to be corrupt. The key calculation about the costs and benefits of corruption is derived from the cost of being the first to opt out of corruption in a given setting or context. Corruption in this context is rooted in the fact that, "where it is insidious, principals are also corrupt and they do not necessarily act in the interest of society as a whole but

5 Marquette, "The Politics of Perception: Use and Abuse of Transparency International's Approach to Measuring Corruption", *Political Studies* 4, (2009), Pg. 746.

6 Klitgaard, Robert. *Controlling Corruption*. (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1996), Pg. 69.

7 Dike, Victor. *African Economic Analysis. Corruption in Nigeria*: Available at www.africaeconomicanalysis.org. Retrieved 6 February, 2020.

8 Hongying Wang & James N. Rosenau, *Transparency International and Corruption as a Issue of Global Governance*, 7 *Global Governance* 1, (2001), Pg. 49.

rather, they pursue particularistic interests.”⁹ Therefore, where checks and balances and accountability mechanisms are lacking, it allows for individual politicians and bureaucrats to manipulate some means of generating profits to become rich and ensure that they build for themselves the basis for political support. In Nigeria, “this has provided new opportunities for the appropriation of public resources and accumulation of wealth.”¹⁰ These happen due to lack of stringent inculcation of ethical norms and the benefits of patriotism among the people of all classes. Corruption would hardly have space in a serious politically minded and ethically well conducted context where people are willing to provide genuine leadership and governance.

Factors Responsible for Corruption and Corrupt Practices in Nigerian Politics

Some of the factors responsible for corrupt practices include but not limited to the followings:

- i. **Greed and selfishness:** Greed entails the dire aspiration for more wealth. It encompasses both the envious and the vandal. Greedy peoples are never satisfied with the wealth they have and do not bother to pull others down provided they acquire what they want even at the detriment of other people. Some people join politics in order to amass wealth to their pockets rather than to serve the people who elected them. The effort to satisfy this desire translates to what is referred to as corruption. Greed has caused a lot of crises in the world, including in Nigeria. It is because of greed that political leaders embezzle from the funds they are supposed to use for national development for their own selfish interests.

9 Mungiu-Pippidi, “Corruption: Diagnosis and Treatment”, *Journal of Democracy*, 3, (2006), Pg. 86.

10 Mark E. Warren, “What Does Corruption Mean in a Democracy?”, Pg. 328-343.

- ii. **Falsehood and Dishonesty:** These words can be used interchangeably and both mean the same thing. They enjoin us as citizens of Nigeria to cultivate both virtues which Dzurghba explains: "As far as these moral virtues are concerned, people should realize the need for them to have a reputation for both virtues. Truthfulness connotes a state of reality or factualness, sincerity, integrity and fairness. It means the absence of deceit and untruthfulness without which society is regarded as Corrupt."¹¹
- iii. **Promotion of partiality:** This is another moral value which every Nigerian should cultivate. Impartiality connotes not being partial in the treatment that one meets out on others. It means not showing an undue favour to one and neglecting the other. It is the absence of bias, favouritism, or nepotism. Impartiality presupposes the value one places on merit, efficiency and productivity while also recognizing the equality of all people irrespective of their state of origin or their religious affiliation. This will bring about increased productivity.
- iv. **Low pay:** Low pay can contribute to corruption within a public administration, workers may devise any means of accruing benefit into their pocket any way it may be unclean, particularly when total remuneration fails to pay a living wage, as is often the case in many Nigeria.
- v. **Lack of Loyalty/Patriotism:** Loyalty presupposes truthfulness and faithfulness to one's duty or obligations. In other words, loyalty connotes owing allegiance to a cause or to someone or better still, to one's country. When a citizen is loyal to his country, such a person will be described as patriotic. When he pays his tax and performs his civic responsibilities as at when due, he is patriotic. Anna captures it correctly when she said:

¹¹ Dzurghba, A. *Contemporary Ethics*, Pg. 80.

“The lack of patriotism is a vice which runs throughout Nigeria and Nigerians will rather prefer to be patriotic to other nations than their own. This has robbed the nation of vital support which it deserves, especially when she is faced with opposition.”¹²

- vi. Pervasion of Justice:** This is an essential aspect of all social, human, and economic relationship. Social order and peace are anchored on the principle of justice. Thus, in ensuring conformity with the social order and maintaining a high degree of ethical standard, justice and its enforcement is crucial for societal good, because, justice presupposes the meting out of appropriate sanction or punishment on erring members of the society according to laid down rules. “It connotes fair play, equality, especially in the distribution of goods and services or in the implementation of infrastructure facilities. Nigerians cultivate these essential moral virtues to put ourselves on the road to social, economic, moral and national development.”¹³
- vii. Crime and violence:** One of the obvious problems staring Nigeria in the face is that of crime and violence which if care is not taken can lead to apparent disintegration of the country. Today organized crime is a lucrative business which is apparently becoming bigger than the Nigeria government. This is the situation in which we have found ourselves and the average Nigeria cannot sleep with two eyes closed for fear of the terror by marauders at night and in broad day light, financial institutions have become targets. Nigerians live hostage their own land crime wave and violence which have impacted negatively on our development.
- viii. Lack of the fear of God:** Corruption has become system ‘systemic corruption’, so much that individual are left with a typical collective action problem, where to choose

¹² Anna Hakobyan & Marie Wolkers, *Local Corruption Diagnostics and Measurement Tools in Africa, u4 Reports*, 2 (Utstein Anti-Corruption Resource Centre, 2004). Available at: www.eldis.org. Retrieved 6 February, (2020).

¹³ Leslie, Palmer. (1985), Pg. 207.

not to be corrupt is seen as illogical or even ridiculous. For example, when one has to pay a bribe, he/she does so because the system he finds himself is corrupt. Both one who demands bribe and the other who pays bribe for unfair advantage have all demonstrated clear lack of ethics and against the tenets of their religious beliefs.

- ix. **Religion and lack of trust:** In a country like Nigeria, where there is widespread religious competition and conflict along religious (and often also ethnic) lines, to enlist religious leaders in the fight against corruption could be problematic.
- x. **Corruption in the Name of God:** People indulge in corrupt practices in the name of God. They undertake to 'make God a stakeholder in corruption' by constructing temples or donating ill-gotten wealth to charity.¹⁴

Corruption manifests its self in form of; theft of financial resources, influence peddling, kickbacks, extortion, misuse of public property and funds, patronage, nepotism, shared experience, shared interest etc. In non-corrupt society, institutions in both the public and private sectors support integrity in public life, such institutions, both formal and informal, are sufficiently strong to return to a non-corrupt equilibrium.

Ethical Evaluation of the Effects of Corrupt practices and Governance in Nigeria

Ethics is "concerns with establishing and recommending of certain courses of action, which are wrong, bad, vicious, or foolish, it deals with conduct, behavior good or bad, while, governance is the relationship between government and citizen in terms of sound administration and management of public resources, as well as a concern with democratic politics."¹⁵

¹⁴ Adeyemi A.F. *Introducing Ethics: Trends, Problems and Perspectives*, Pg. 236.

¹⁵ Abogunrin, S.O "Religion, Crime and National Survival" *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies*. Xxvi (2-1) June and December, Pg.14.

Governance affects every aspects of sustainable development which includes; “the organization’s arrangements for following up on policies and plans of monitoring performance.”¹⁶ These can better be achieved through the inculcation of good conduct by the people concerned to avoid elements of corruption which have adverse effect on the citizens. Corruption affects poor people disproportionately especially on the provision of basic services, and has a negative effect on domestic investment, tax revenues, performance and productivity, as well as negative consequences on the environment. Corruption is so much rooted in the fabric of our society to the extent that it is been downplayed as if it is part of the value systems of the society. The effects of corruption are numerous, these problems include the diminutive economic growth which we are experiencing largely due to the hyper inflation, low capital utilization and decline in foreign investments. This is captured in the words of Abogunrin, when he said that: “The country is entangled in foreign debts and the economy is controlled by a group of cabals who are interested in their own packets. As such, a lot of money is been siphoned into foreign accounts while the citizens of the country are being impoverished.”¹⁷ Unfortunately, while miscreants find their ways into positions of authority, the intellectuals are hunted after as freedom of the people are been suppressed. There is also the danger of insecurity; people are threatened from time to time by hired assassins, kidnapers, militias of different brands, cases of armed bandits/robbery attacks are rampant. The nation has been plunged into series of violent attacks from different militant groups, “this paints a picture of a nation that is incapable of solving its internal problems pointing to the fact that national growth and developments cannot be achieved given the state of moral decay in Nigeria.”¹⁸ The embezzlement of hundreds of billions

16 Gerry, S. “Governance as theory: Five Propositions” *International Journal of Social Sciences* 50 (1), (1998) , Pg. 77.

17 Jhingan, M.I. *The Economic of Development Planning* (39th edition) (Delhi: Viranda, 2007), Pg. 63.

18 Richard Rose, *Measuring Corruption Perceptions and Experiences*. (Manchester: University Press. 2008), Pg. 12-14.

by political office holders to finance ostentatious lifestyles, buy expensive property both at home and overseas, while, the ordinary Nigerian citizens continue to welter in abject poverty adequately explains how our leaders play out very clearly, "their greed and insensitivity a mist the plight of the citizens."¹⁹ Though, the two anti-corruption agencies, the EFCC and ICPC were established to check these excesses, yet the tidal waves of moral decay and corruption have been expanding ever since and are threatening to overwhelm even the judicial system, which is the last hope of the common man. It suggests in this connection that owing to the low level of moral consciousness in majority of Nigerian politicians and political office holders implies that the country is under the dominance of robbers. This negative posture is at variance with the ideas of great political philosophers such as Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo etc, who saw politics as one of the most important vocations for the noblest minds, because of its critical importance in the sustenance of civilization. Frankly speaking, sensitivity to morality and willingness to act in accordance with its basic prescriptions, we maintain, is a *sine qua non* in politics and political leadership. Any society where the leaders routinely disobey fundamental moral principles suffers from acute moral kwashiorkor and is thrown into deep trouble. The account of corruption in the political economy of Nigeria has become a matter of concern. Corroborating this notion, Kayode Oladele, submits that; "with the efforts to fight against these challenges of corruption, we have witnessed the implementation of several anti-corruption policies such as EFCC, ICPC and creation of some anti-corruption institutions while numerous corrupt politicians, public office holders, oil and bank executives are been arrested and jailed for their crimes."²⁰ These efforts facilitated the recovery of millions of looted wealth government and the private sectors both within and outside Nigeria. In spite

19 Kayode, A.M.O. "Religion, Politics and Society." (Ibadan: Religious Studies Series, 1998). pg. 55.

20 Malomo, A.D. *Religious Establishments and Ethical Revolution in Nigeria*. (Ibadan: Daystar Press. 1986), Pg. 56.

of these achievements, corruption thrives as a major challenge of governance in Nigeria. The fundamental issues that have not only occasioned serious corruption on Nigeria but have also continued to depress good governance include but not limited to the followings:

- i. **The Political Elite on Corruption and Corrupt Practices in Nigeria:** This is a situation where the political elites, through their awful acts of political accommodation driven by the quest to gain political power by all means turn a blind eye to corruption and the corrupt. The political elites rather than view corruption as a malady that can dent the chances of a political party, accommodate individuals with questionable characters or people who are being investigated for serious acts of corruption into a political party even when such individuals are known to be corrupt. Unfortunately, even where allegation of corruption has been labeled against political office holders, they do not resign to avoid interference in investigation of their actions.
- ii. **Weak Anti-corruption Institutions:** The challenges faced by anti-corruption institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). If the EFCC arrests a corrupt public officer for stealing money and the courts release such individuals after paying a token. If these same institutions are weak or compromised, it would be difficult to process and deepen the fight against corruption and promote good governance.
- iii. **Weak Legal Framework:** Some judges have rightly, argued that the light punishment for corruption is based on the existing laws and inadequate legal framework. For example, it may not be fair if someone pleaded guilty to breach of trust and fraudulently converting about N2bn of people's pension funds to private use, but upon conviction, the trial Judge sentenced such a person to two years imprisonment with an option of fine in the sum of N750,000.00 for pleading guilty to the

offense which could have attracted a maximum of two years jail term as the conviction would be overtly light and against the weight of evidence. The Judge may manipulate the inadequate legal provisions and the inherent weakness in the criminal justice administration system to abuse his discretion in favour of the accused. For instance, Section 309 of the Penal Code, under which Yusuf was sentenced, provides that “whoever commits criminal misappropriation shall be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years or with fine or with both”.²¹ Unless this law would be amended to provide for stiffer penalty by the National Assembly.

- iv. **Lack of Concerted effort for Collective Governance:** In this sense collective governance is grounded in democracy so much that both the government and the governed are conscious of their roles and responsibilities in the governance process. The sense of collective governance entails that, governance is not only restricted to governments. Rather, the civil society organizations and groups are involved in shaping and sustaining best practices in governance as the government officials themselves. Citizens become proactive members of the state. The point here is that, even where government and the country’s leadership is corrupt and fail the governed would not show their distaste for corruption. Collective governance would be attained only when the people for whom government exists in the first place have a mindset that they chiefly determine who rules them and how they should be ruled.

Conclusion

Corruption is a phenomenon with many faces, characterised by an array of economic, political, administrative, social and cultural factors, both domestic and international in nature.

²¹ United Nations Development Program, UNDP, Management Development & Governance Division, *Fighting Corruption to Improve Governance*, 6th November 13, (1998), Pg. 67.

Corruption is not an innate form of behaviour, but rather a symptom of wider dynamics. It may result from interactions, opportunities, strengths and weaknesses in socio-political systems. Corruption opens up and closes down spaces for individuals, groups, organisations and institutions that populate civil society, the state, the public sector and the private sector. It is, above all, the result of dynamic relationships between multiple actors. To allow space for development in Nigeria, the issue of Corruption must be squarely tackled. It means for Nigerians to enjoy development with positive impact, there must be promotion of ethics and accountability in governance by all both those saddled with the responsibility of leadership as well as the followership. Conversely, the widespread underdevelopment and forms of deprivations, poverty and iniquities are derived from governance that is devoid of ethics and accountability. Also, given the general poverty, deprivations and iniquities facing the generality of Nigerians, especially in the face of abundant natural resources and manpower, many people have concluded that the extravagant spending of resources has more to do with unethical behaviours in the Nigerian political system which accepts bribery, nepotism, misappropriation and indiscipline. However, these can be curbed through promotion of accountability and good governance.

Recommendations

Good governance is tightly linked to ethical behaviours of leaders and all citizens. Accordingly, in the struggle to pave way for good governance and national development, it necessary for us to mitigate unethical behaviours. The paper therefore, recommends the followings:

- i. Government should ensure equity and inclusiveness by taken into consideration members of society, especially the most vulnerable, are in policymaking so no one would feel alienated, disenfranchised or left behind. Since good governance demands that preferential attention is given to the plight of the poor, marginalized and needy.

- ii. Government should strengthen the legal framework. Laws should be responsive to the needs of society, fair and impartially enforced. Such that all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, should be accountable to laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced independently adjudicated and consistent with international human rights norms and standards.
- iii. Transparency should be encouraged and the process of decision-making by those in power should be scrutinized by concerned members of society. Transparency rests on a partnership where officials make information clearly available to the people who are stake holders.
- iv. Government officials should bear in mind that accountability also requires political energy, in the sense that people, interest groups, civil society, the courts, the press, and opposition parties must insist that those who govern too follow legitimate mandates and explain their actions. Those demanding accountability should also be confident that officials will respond honestly.
- v. Nigerians should imbibe the spirit of righteousness as a matter of relationship with God, with things and with other people. Righteousness entails the ability to respond correctly to the value of the relationship, whether in politics, government, civil service or in private organisations.
- vi. The criminal justice administration system should be strengthened as a matter of urgent attention to handle punitive measures for corruption in Nigeria in such a way as to avoid halting prosecution of cases by endless, and most times frivolous interlocutory applications and appeals to aid their clients to malingering and hide from the law.

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