

Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Fight against Corruption in Public Service in Benue State

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Abstract

This paper interrogates Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the fight against corruption in public service in Benue State with the focus on determining the causes of corruption public service in Benue State, ascertaining the efficacy of EFCC in combating corruption in public service in the state and identifying the challenges facing EFCC in combating corruption in public service in Benue State. The study employed survey design as its methodology making use of questionnaires as the major instrument of data collection. Findings of the study revealed that, over the years, EFCC has arrested and detained many government officials and public servants in Benue State on allegation of embezzlement, bribery, criminal breach of trust, money laundering and diversion of state funds. However, it is sad to state that, no public servant in the state have been sentence to prison as such the efforts made by EFCC in tackling economic and financial crimes in Benue State public service has not produced the desired result as there is still high preference of corruption in public service in the state, a development which have continue to serve as an impediment to the goals of socio-economic development in Benue State. The study recommended that, EFCC should be more proactive in carrying out its duties in line with the provisions of the constitution and those found guilty of

corrupt practices should be prosecuted to serve as deterrence to others in future.

Key words: EFCC, Corruption, Public Service, Development and Underdevelopment

Introduction

Nigeria as a country is richly blessed by nature with human, material and natural resources that if properly tapped and managed the country would have been among the developed nations of the world. Despite been greatly naturally endowed by nature the country have remained grossly underdevelopment. One factor that is responsible for this development is the high prevalence of corruption in Nigerian public service. Nigeria is ranked 154 out 180 countries by Transparency International (Transparency International, 2022).

Since independence in 1960 the nation has been affected by the malaise of corruption and the public sector is one sector that has been badly hit by malaise of corruption in the country. Corruption is known to have impacted negatively on all sectors in Nigeria, including the public bureaucracy, security agencies and financial institutions, among others. In Nigerian public service, corruption is apparent and manifests in the form of misappropriation, kickback, bribery, embezzlement, ghost workers syndrome, increment of wage bill, criminal breach of trust, budget padding, money laundering, outright looting of the treasuring, among others.

Dike (1999) contends that the menace of corruption is responsible for slow movement of files in offices, executive delay in policy formation and implementation, parliamentary delay of legislation, judicial adjudication of justice, police extortion at tollgates and slow traffics on the highways, port congestion, queues at passport offices and gas stations, ghost workers syndrome, election irregularities, bad governance and underdevelopment in the country.

Corruption in Nigerian public service has been adjudged to be responsible for the present state of underdevelopment of the country as funds meant for development are diverted to unproductive ventures, embezzled and misappropriated. This unfortunate situation accounts poor road network, inadequate electricity supply, poor health care services delivery, poor education and lack of portable water supply even in urban centre, insecurity and high prevalence of poverty and unemployment, among others (Okolo and Akpokighe, 2014).

In an attempt to tackle the menace of corruption in Nigeria, successive administration at different intervals had successively instituted and established different agencies to prevent and combat corruption in the country in the between 1983-1998 without much success. With the return to democratic governance in 1999 after several years of military rule and the high prevalence of corruption in the country former President Obasanjo in an effort to tackle corruption in the country established the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) in 2000, Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) and Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) in 2003 (Nwoba and Nwokwu, 2018). Since the agency was established in 2003, it has arrested, detained and prosecuted many people in the public service in Nigeria including top government officials in the country.

In Benue State as well since the return to democratic governance in 1999, the public service in the state has been faced with high profile cases of economic and financial crimes such as misappropriation and embezzlement of funds meant for the development of the state from 1999 till date. In response to combating economic and financial crimes in Benue State public service, EFCC has over the years arrested, detained and arraigned many public servants in the state (Mile, Iorngurun, and Apinega, 2021).

The level in which the agency has carried out its duties in combating corruption in Benue State is unknown as current

researches on the subject matter have scarcely isolated efforts of EFCC in combating corruption in public service in Benue State. This therefore deserves an academic inquiry. It is against this background that, the research set out to investigate Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the fight against corruption in public service in Benue State with the focus on determining the causes of corruption public service in Benue State, ascertaining the efficacy of EFCC in combating corruption in public service in the state and identifying the challenges facing EFCC in combating corruption in public service in Benue State with emphasis on determining the causes of corruption.

Conceptual Clarifications Corruption

The World Bank (2018) defines corruption as the misuse of public office for private benefits. Public office is misused for private benefit when an official agree to receive, gain, take, ask for, seek or extorts a bribe. It is also misused when private representatives actively put forward bribes to circumvent public offices and processes for competitive edges or gain. Corruption, like all social phenomena, is comprehensible only in its total social context, its peculiar form, dynamics and degree of social and cultural suitability or forbearance being critically related to the dominant mode of capital accumulation; exploitation, income, wealth and poverty distribution, power composition; and the underpinning moral and ethical values operating in a given society. In agreement, Transparency International (2022) sees corruption as the abuse of delegated authority for personal benefit. This entails that, the concept of corruption include personal gain and also corporate gain. Corruption spans across different kinds, forms and ranges from administrative payment issues to expenses made to domestic government executives and their family members.

In this paper, corruption can be defined as the abuse, misuse and the violation of set standards, principles, values and norms of

a society through receipt or offer of bribe, misuse of public office or trust for private gains and or misappropriation of public funds meant for the development and the improvement in the living conditions of the people. The private gains could be economic, political, administrative or social.

Public Service

The public service is a branch of government which is usually grouped with the executive, and without which governments cannot function. Conversely, the public service is the term used to refer to servants of the central government, state or local government. These are people that are employed as permanent staff of the departments or ministries of governments. The public service stands out as a critical machinery of government in the formulation and implementation of public policies and programmes. It does this by translating the policies and programmes of government into solid public goods and services for the use of the citizens (Eme, 2011). Adebayo (2014) reiterates that, public service is responsible for the administration of the machinery of government that is responsible for the formulation and implementation of day to day government policies and programmes to the overall benefit of the masses.

In this paper, the public service is the totality of the civil bureaucracy set up by governments to assist, plan, formulate, administer and implement their policies and programmes. Generally, public service organizations are formed by the government to goods and deliver services to the people for their overall wellbeing.

EFCC and the Fight against Corruption in Nigerian Public Service

Since independence in 1960 the nation has been affected by the malaise of corruption and the public sector is one sector that has been badly hit by malaise of corruption in the country. Corruption in Nigerian public service has been adjudged to be responsible for

the present state of underdevelopment of the country as funds meant for development are diverted to unproductive ventures, embezzled and misappropriated.

Over the years, several worthwhile efforts have been put in place as measures by successive administrations to fight the scourge in the past in the country; General Murtala Muhammed introduced War against Corruption which undoubtedly resulted in to the public service purge of 1976. The Jaji Declaration of 1977 was also a measure adopted by General Olusegen Obasanjo to fight the culture of corruption, bribery and indiscipline in the country. Buhari/Idiagbon regime in 1984 launched an anti- corruption programme popularly known as War against Indiscipline. Babangida regime introduced Mass Mobilization for Social Justice Self Reliance and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) and Recovery of Public Property (Special Military Tribunal Act Cap 387 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 1990) as amended in 1991. Sani Abacha in 1996 introduced his own version of War against Indiscipline and corruption. These measures notwithstanding corruption were still wreaking havoc on the image of the country among nations (Nwoba and Nwokwu, 2018).

However, the administration of former president Obasanjo administration concerted effort to reclaim the battered image of the Nigeria at the global stage deemed it expedient to frontally tackle the hydra-headed monster via the establishment of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2003 (Nwoba and Nwokwu, 2018).

EFCC as established, has the capacity to tackle all ramifications, the EFCC is empowered by law to investigate, prevent and prosecute offenders who engage in “Money laundering, embezzlement, bribery, looting and any form of corrupt practices, illegal arms deal, smuggling, human trafficking, and child labour, illegal oil bunkering, illegal mining, tax evasion, foreign exchange malpractices including counterfeiting of currency, theft of intellectual property and piracy, open market

abuse, dumping of toxic wastes, and prohibited goods” (Section 46, EFCC Establishment Act, 2004). The Commission is also responsible for identifying, tracing, freezing, confiscating, or seizing proceeds derived from terrorist activities. EFCC is also host to the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU), vested with the responsibility of collecting suspicious transactions reports (STRs) from financial and designated non-financial institutions, analyzing and disseminating them to all relevant government agencies and other Financial Intelligence Units all over the world (EFCC, 2004; Onuigbo and Eme, 2015; Wasiu, 2018).

Since its establishment EFCC has recorded some degree of success in its fight against corruption, the agency investigated and arraigned top politicians and businessmen in different courts across the country. Prominent among them include; the former House of Representatives speaker Dimeji Bankole, former governors such as Adebayo Aloa-Akala of Oyo State, Aliyu Akwe-Doma of Nassarawa state, and Gbenga Daniels of Ogun State, chief Timipre Sylva of Bayelsa, Murtala Nyako of Adamawa, Senator Gabriel Suswam of Benue State, Saidu Dakingari of Kebbi State for embezzling their state resources while they served in office to a tune of N302 billion (EFCC, 2022)

The Commission has prosecuted former governor of Taraba State Jolly Nyame for criminal breach of trust and misappropriation N1.6 billion during his tenure as governor. Also, The Commission has prosecuted former governor of Plateau State Senator Joshua Dariye for N1.16 billion fraud. Jolly Nyame was convicted by the court for 12 years in prison while Joshua Dariye was supposed to spend 14 years in prison after convicted by the court (EFCC, 2022). Both of them have been released in recent times by President Buhari through presidential pardon.

Other arrested by the Commission include; Esai Dangaba, Atiku Kigo, Ahmed Inuwa Wada, John Yusufu, Veronica Ulonma, and Zani Zira are facing prosecuted for defrauding the Police Pension Scheme in the sum of N32.8billion. Former Petroleum

Minister Diezani Alison-Madueke was arrested for diverting \$6 billion (N1.2 trillion) from the Nigerian treasury. Stella Oduah (ex-Aviation Minister) was arrested by the Commission for spending over N255 million on luxurious cars. Former National Security Adviser, Colonel Sambo Dasuki (rtd), was arrested for embezzling \$2.1 billion meant for arms procurement to fight against Boko Haram insurgency in the country. Also, Nigeria's ex-Chief of Defense Staff late General Alex Badeh was alleged diversion of N3.9 billion (\$20 million) meant for the purchase of arms (EFCC, 2022).

Furthermore, former SGF Babachir Lawal arrested by EFCC for misuse of 200 million funds meant for people displaced by Boko Haram. In recent times, the Commission has arrested Former Accountant General of the Federation Mr. Ahmed Idris, over alleged diversion and laundering of N80billion. Over, all the Commission has made over 4000 arrests over the years and recovered over N4 trillion (EFCC, 2022). Despite the efforts made by the Commission tackling corruption in the country, there is still high prevalence of corruption in the country.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data that was generated from the field through the administration of questionnaires were analyzed using content analysis and simple percentages with tables. The aim was to provide evidence of the efforts made by EFCC in fighting corruption in public service in Benue State. The sample size for this study was drawn from three (3) ministries namely; ministries of finance, education and information and culture in the state public service. Twenty (20) respondents were selected from each ministry. In total, six (60) respondents were selected in the Benue State public service and served with questionnaire. The questionnaire used was divided into two sections. Section A was concerned with the personal information and characteristics of the respondents, while section B was made up of three items on EFCC

and the fight against corruption in public service in Benue State in which the study is aimed at.

Table 1: Bio- Data of Respondents

Socio Economic Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	33	33
Female	27	45
Age		
18-30	9	15
31-40	18	30
41-50	21	35
51 above	12	20
Educational Qualification		
Not literate	0	0
Primary education	3	5
Secondary education	21	35
Tertiary education	36	60
Occupation		
Public service	63	35
Total	60	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2023*

Table1 indicate that a total of 33(55%) respondents in the study were males while 27(45%) were females. The male dominated the sample because statistic has shown that, men were most involved in corrupt practices in Benue State. The age distribution shows that, respondents between ages 18-30 were 9(15%), 31-40 18(30%), 41-50 21(35%) while those between ages 51 and above where 12(20%). Those from 41-50 and above dominated the sample because they are most involved corrupt practices in the public service in the state. The education attainment of the respondents indicates that, no respondent was not literate, 3(5%) had primary education, 21(35%) had secondary education while 36(60%) had attained some form of tertiary education. This implies that, the

majority of the sampled population are knowledgeable about the issues under discourse and were capable of answering the questions effectively. The occupation of respondents indicates that; all the respondents were public servants. This is because the study is on corruption in public service in the state.

Table 2 Data presentation and analysis

Responses	Respondents	Percentage
Causes of corruption in Benue State public service		
Poor condition of service	21	35
Non-payment of salaries at as when due	21	35
Lack of promotion as at when due	15	25
Greed/selfish interest	3	5
The efficacy of EFCC in combating corruption in public service in Benue State		
EFCC has arrested public servants	39	65
EFCC has confiscation of properties of those involved in corrupt practices	21	35
EFCC prosecuted public servants in the state	0	0
EFCC is proactive in carrying out its constitutional mandate in combating corruption in public	0	0
Challenges facing EFCC in combating corruption in public service in Benue State		
Administrative bottle-necks	22	37
Political interference	17	28
Inadequate funding	3	5
Inefficiency by the judiciary in handling court cases	18	30
Total	60	100

Source: *Field Survey, 2023*

On the causes of corruption in Benue State in public, the result indicates that, 21(35%) respondents were of the opinion that, poor condition of service is among the causes of corruption in Benue State, 21(35%) respondents maintained that, on-payment of salaries at as when due is among the causes of corruption in Benue State, 25(15%) respondents stated that, lack of promotion as at when due is among the causes of corruption in Benue State while 3(5%)

argued that that, greed/selfish interest is among the causes of corruption in Benue State. This implies that, the causes of corruption in Benue State are multi-dimensional ranging from poor condition of service, non-payment of salaries as at when due, lack of promotion as at when due and greed/selfish interest.

On the efficacy of EFCC in combating corruption in public service in Benue State, the result shows that 39(65%) of the respondents were of the view that, EFCC has arrested public servants, 43(24%) respondents were of the opinion that, corruption affects primary health care services delivery in Benue State, 21(35%) respondents maintained that, EFCC has confiscation of properties of those involved in corrupt practices while no respondent said EFCC prosecuted public servants in the state while stated that, EFCC is proactive in carrying out its constitutional mandate in the state. This implies that, EFCC is not proactive in combating corruption in public service in Benue State. The efforts put forward by government through the various anti-corruption agencies in tackling corruption in Benue State has not produced the desired result as no high ranking public servant have been sentence to prison. There is still high prevalence of corruption in Benue State a development which have continue to serve as an impediment to the goals of infrastructure development in Benue State.

Finally, in regards to challenges facing EFCC in combating corruption in public service in Benue State, the result indicates that 22(27%) respondents were of the opinion that, administrative bottle-necks is among challenges facing EFCC in combating corruption in public service in Benue State, 17(28%) respondents stated that, political interference is among challenges facing EFCC in combating corruption in public service in Benue State, 3(5%) respondents maintained that, inadequate funding is among challenges facing EFCC in combating corruption in public service in Benue State while 18(30%) respondents maintained that, inefficiency by the judiciary in handling court cases is among

challenges facing EFCC in combating corruption in public service in Benue State. This implies that, administrative bottle-necks, political interference, inadequate funding and inefficiency by the judiciary in handling court cases are among challenges facing EFCC in combating corruption in public service in Benue State.

Discussion of Findings

Finding of this paper revealed that, the causes of corruption in Benue State are multi-dimensional ranging from poor condition of service, non-payment of salaries as at when due, lack of promotion as at when due and greed/selfish interest.

Also, the study revealed that, EFCC has over the years arrested, detained and arraigned many public servants in the state. Prominent among the public servants investigated or still under investigation by the agency include; former governor of the state George Akume who was alleged to have embezzled 2 billion naira from the state treasury meant for socio-economic development between 1999-2007. Also, EFCC has arraigned most of the people whom were indicted by Justices Kpojime Commission of Inquiry that probe all finances that were accrued to Benue State government from 2007 to 2015. Former governor Gabriel Suswam and many of his appointees including civil servants that held key positions in his administration were alleged to have engaged in dubious expenditures and looting the state treasury amounting to 107 billion naira. They include; Hon. Solomon Wombo, Omodachi Oklobia, Emmanuel Atini, Asen Sambe, Isaiah Ipevnor, Hon. Paul Biam, Aza Biam, Maria Iyortyom, Michael Oko Agbam, Miss Ajuma Olokpo and Abel Musa of (GTbank Staff). Others are Mohammed Kabir Rago, Hon. Terna Kester Ikyenge, late Hon. Yerfa Atoza Hindan, Terna Iyorkyaan, San Carlos, Barr Tyokegh, Christian Aba, Sunday D. Umoru and Ruth Ijir, among many others.

Similarly, the EFCC has arraigned former governor of the state senator Gabriel Suswam and the former Commissioner of Finance

in Suswam's administration, Omadachi Okolobia on money laundering charges to the tune of 3.1 billion. Suswam and Okolobia were alleged to have conspired to launder money, belonging to the state government through the engagement of Abubakar Umar, a Bureau De Change operator and of Fanffash Resources. Furthermore, former speaker of Benue State House of Assembly Terkimbi Ikyange and principal officers of 8th assembly was invited and detained by EFCC, they were alleged to have embezzled a whopping sum of 750 million meant for the purchase of vehicles for their colleagues. In recent years, EFCC has dragged Mr. Stephen Amase, a principal private secretary to Governor Samuel Ortom and a former Commission of Works in the state, who is now the special adviser to Governor Samuel Ortom on Ministry of Energy, Science and Technology and Mr. Emmanuel Manger for alleged 4.76 billion fraud in the state. It is instructive to state that, the efforts put forward by EFCC in tackling economic and financial crimes in Benue State public service has not produced the desired result; no high ranking public servant have been sentence to prison. There is still high preference of corruption in Benue State public service a development which have continue to serve as an impediment to the goals of socio-economic development in Benue State.

Finally, the study revealed that, administrative bottle-necks, political interference, inadequate funding and inefficiency by the judiciary in handling court cases are among challenges facing EFCC in combating corruption in public service in Benue State.

Conclusion

Corruption is a major challenges affecting efficiency in public service in Benue State. The study discovered that, there is high prevalence of corruption in the public service in Benue State which is rationalize by flimsy excuses like poor condition of service, non-payment of salaries as at when due, lack of promotion as at when due and greed/selfish interest among others. Benue State has

witnessed the presence of institutional mechanisms for combating corruption in public service Benue State as EFCC over the years has arrested and detained many government officials and civil servants in Benue State on allegation of embezzlement, and diversion of state funds. However, no money has been returned to the state account as a result of these arrests. Consequently, the war against corruption has not been won as EFCC has not performed its duty effectively as corruption has persist in public service in Benue State. The study therefore concludes that, the current high level of corruption in public service in Benue State is not insurmountable given an objective analysis of the causative factors and adoption of correct institutional mechanisms to address the multi- dimensional issues involved.

The following are the recommendation for this paper:

Those found guilty of corrupt practices in Benue State in particular and Nigeria at large should be prosecuted in line with the provisions of the constitution as this will serve as deterrence to others in future.

The anti-corruption agencies should be given total independent without interference from the government in power in order to enable them to carry out their duties more diligently and effectively.

Special tribunal should be established by the Nigerian government to try corruption cases. This will give speed and quick judgment to corruption cases.

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