

Contribution of Public Administration in the War against Corruption in Nigeria: A Historical Discourse (1975-2004)

NDUM, VICTOR ETIM (PH.D)¹, THEOPHILUS, OYIME ADEJUMO (PH.D)², DEMORT, STEPHEN³

¹ *Institute of Public Policy and Administration, University of Calabar, Cross River State-Nigeria*

^{2,3} *Department of Political Science, University of Calabar, Calabar –Nigeria*

Abstract- Corruption in the Nigerian public service has become a syndrome. The issue of accountability of resources, both human and financial, in the public service is a very vital one, especially as it concerns development and proper harnessing of our limited resources. Public servants are expected to give account of public resources committed and entrusted on them. This is why accountability in the public service has always occupied the priority list of every succeeding administration. In this paper, the nature, causes and effects of corruption are considered. The role of public administration in the war against corruption in Nigeria is historically examined between 1975-2004. The paper recommended among others, that a good, sound and moral education will help Nigerian leaders and citizens to be conscious of the fact that all hands must be put together to work towards the progress of this great nation.

Indexed Terms- Contribution, public administration, corruption, historical discourse

I. INTRODUCTION

Corruption has become a universal problem for all governments and all countries (Scot, 1995). Corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society, it is at present one of the greatest obstacles to national development. The late Nnamdi Azikiwe, a president of Nigeria in the First Republic was so bothered by the level of corruption in the country that he warned that with the vice of corruption permeating the country, “the prestige of our nation dwindles to the vanishing point, defacing our national image and bringing shame to all Nigerians.”

Corruption embraces a broad spectrum of activities ranging from fraud (theft through misrepresentation),

embezzlement (misappropriation of public funds) to bribery (payments made in order to gain an advantage or to avoid a disadvantage), etc.

According to Philip Nichols (1999), corruption affects any polity in a negative manner. Its effects are particularly acute in emerging economies and worse off for endemically corrupt polities where according to him, positive change and economic growth cannot possibly occur.

Corruption is universally declaimed and constitutes a phenomenon in itself and is invariably the output of a conglomeration of discrete failures; a failure of institutional control over bureaucrats or a failure of the legal system that checkmates the behaviour of those who perpetuate the crime.

It is interesting to note that the critical issues of government ultimately involve moral issues. The definitive policy decisions made by public officials often have at their base conflicting ethical issues, such as whether to give precedence to the public interest or to the narrower demands of clientele, department or self. The ambivalent position in which public officials often find themselves can lead sensitive scholars to the conclusion that the chief qualification of an executive is the ability to resolve those competing ethical codes, legal/technical, personal, professional and organizational codes.

The Nigerian experience with corruption has left the nation in a dilemma. The late Professor Claude Ake’s Centre for Advanced Social Science (CASS), Port Harcourt Charter, stated that the tendency of Nigeria to rationalize corruption might also have helped to consolidate it, “Wealthy people who are known to be corrupt are regularly courted and honoured by

communities, religious bodies, social clubs and other private organizations.

This paper *on the* contributions of public administration in the war against corruption in Nigeria, gives a critical examination of the whole web of corrupt practices in Nigeria. Corruption can be political, bureaucratic, economic, moral or social in nature. The paper also identifies some causes of corruption in Nigeria and their effects. The instrumentalities of Due Process, SERVICOM and most especially EFCC and ICPC formed very significant areas of contribution of public administration in curbing the menace of corruption in Nigeria.

II. CONCEPTUALIZING CORRUPTION

From its etymology, corruption is derived from the Latin word, “Corruptio” (Corruptere Corruptus), literally meaning “to rot” “to decompose”, to “disintegrate” or “to decay”. In other words, corruption signifies “impairment of integrity, virtue or moral principle”; an inducement to wrongdoing by “improper or unlawful means (as bribery) and “a departure from the original or from what is pure and correct”.

In its strict sense, corruption is understood as an act of being dishonest with a given responsibility or duty for selfish ends. It is the use of a position of trust for dishonest and selfish gain. It also involves the violation of established rules for personal gain and inordinate profit making.

According to Wilkins (1970: iii), corruption is defined as “behaviour which is different from or conflicts with the standards which are accepted as normal within a group or social system.”

Scholars such as Huntington (1968), Leff (1964), Bayley (1966), Abueve A. (1966), in Heidenheimer (1970), have all defined corruption in ways that have enough in common, that is, departure from accepted public rules and standards. Corruption, as considered in the light of the above scholars, presupposes that there is known and agreed what these standards are and what they should be. These standards arise from commonly shared beliefs, practices and values of a

community or social institution. Individual conduct is then measured or gauged according to the conformity or deviation from the standards.

In another vein, Atlas (1968), considers it as a symptom of dysfunctionality of the relationship between the state and the people characterized by bribery, extortion, and nepotism. It can also involve the misuse of entrusted power for private gain (Transparency International, 2006). Thus, corruption is the abuse of public office for private benefits.

Some scholars maintain that the concept of public interest is very significant in illustrating corruption he pattern of corruption can be said to exist whenever a power holder who is charged with doing certain things, that is, who is a responsible functionary or office holder, is by monetary or other rewards not legally provided for, induced to take actions which favour whoever provides the rewards and thereby does damage to the public and its interest.

Corruption is therefore related to the performance associated with a public office, and deviations from laws and procedures that regulate the conduct of public servants.

III. NATURE OF CORRUPTION

Corruption in Nigeria manifests itself in various forms.

- Political Corruption:

This could be seen to mean the unlawful use of influence, power and other means to achieve one’s political ambition. It includes dishonesty, partial behaviour on the part of the politicians, government parastatals, or employees against the masses. It includes a wide range of crimes and illicit acts, committed by political leaders. Moreover, political corruption is an abuse of political system, of trust and of the principles that make democracy effective. It causes the lack of faith in politics, bleaches trust in politicians and parties and challenges the values of democracy thereby making the various institutions of democratic government vulnerable.

Political corruption erodes the institutional capacity of government as procedures are disregarded, resources are siphoned ‘off’ and officials are hired or promoted

without regard to performance. It undermines the legitimacy of government.

- **Economic Corruption:**

Considered in the context of this paper, corruption undermines economic development of a state by generating considerable distortions and inefficiency. Economic corruption emerges in both private and public sectors. In the private sector, there is an increase in the cost of business inflation in the normal prices of goods, illicit payments, bleaches in contracts, unhealthy competition, adulteration of products etc. In the public sector, it manifests itself in distortions into government budgetary plans, diversion of public investments into private projects, bribes, kickbacks of government plans, reduction in the quality of government services and infrastructures. Thus, economic or business corruption can be defined as the abuse of or misuse of the economy of a given nation through illicit payment, inflation etc. In virtually all educational institutions in Nigeria, under-funding and lack of funds is a general problem, and this is the resultant effect of corrupt practices in the system (Ndum and Okey, 2013).

- **Moral Corruption:**

This form of corruption is considered the worst, since moral conduct is the summit of every ideal state or nation. Moral corruption will lead to devastation or destruction of any given society. In actual sense, what makes a society (state or nation) to be “good” is the moral upbringing of her members. If the members of that state are morally corrupt, eventually that state cannot progress politically, socially, economically and otherwise. The problem of Nigeria is characterized by this unfortunately phenomenon.

In most Nigerian institutions, as well as in the rest of the country cultism, prostitution, robbery, assassination, murder and other uncharitable vices have filled up the land.

Morality constitutes the basis for effective governance and leadership. It simply refers to the goodness or badness of human actions. When individuals’ behaviours are perverted, then moral corruption becomes predominant. By way of simple definition, moral corruption is best understood as “A violation or

distortion of moral principles or norms of a given society.

- **Social corruption:**

Social corruption is particularly associated with anarchy, distortion or disorder in a given society, otherwise known as societal degeneration or deterioration. This form of corruption leads to environmental degradation or pollution. Thus, one can define social or physical corruption as a form of disorderliness of a given structure, be it a state or natural objects.

- **Bureaucratic Corruption:**

It arises when for example; underhanded deals are made between public authorities and elements in the private sector in order to get special favours (fiscal). This include for instance, the design or selection of uneconomical projects because of opportunities for financial kickbacks, procurement, fraud, including payments, collusion, over charging, misrepresentation, the delivery of substantial goods and services; and illicit payments and receipts of ‘spend money’... bureaucratic corruption also includes extortion, misappropriation of funds, nepotism, and favouritism, personal use of official and government secrets, any improper exercising of power or even time wasting or sleeping on the job.

IV. CAUSES OF CORRUPTION

Mamadu, (2009:72) points to the following causes as being responsible for the growth of corruption in Nigeria today. These include:

- The sowed seed of colonial Regime
- The problem of leadership
- The influence of foreign nations
- The high rate of unemployment in the country
- Poor wages and salaries to workers
- Religious conflicts
- Commercialization of religion among the Christian group
- The multi ethnic groups and tribal variations
- Poverty and poor economy
- Political god-fatherism

Other causes of corruption in Nigeria are:

- Unsettled value system

- Lack of commitment to the public interest
- Inadequate and ineffective rules
- Inequality in the distribution of wealth
- Political office as a way of gaining access to wealth
- Absence of a strong sense of nationalism
- Excessive love for material things
- Total disregard for ethical standards, etc.

V. EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION

The implication of corruption in Nigeria is very great, especially in the area of political and economic development. The following could be summarized as the effects:

- i. Corruption leads to non-achievement of goals
- ii. It diverts resources from public purpose to private ones
- iii. It weakens public bureaucracies
- iv. Corruption exerts a corrupting influence on other members of the administrative apparatus
- v. Corruption lowers respects for authority
- vi. Corruption diverts energy into lobbying, fiddling, etc. resulting in inappropriate criteria for arriving at decisions
- vii. Corruption dilutes individual and group commitment to national values and civic responsibilities
- viii. Corruption slows down the pace of economic development through manipulation of fund for projects
- ix. Corruption destroys or weakens efficiency and effectiveness of public service, both civil services and the corporations
- x. Corruption endangers national security internally and externally
- xi. Corruption detracts from the sovereignty of Nigeria and its international standing especially when foreigners distrust Nigerian nationality for acts that are unspeakable
- xii. Corruption endangers national priorities and fairness if people in key positions promote projects or schemes in which they have personal or financial interest against that of the nation
- xiii. Corruption detracts government from giving priority to the areas of income and social inequality, poverty, malnutrition and other areas of need. The net impact of corruption on society is negative

- xiv. The political-economic consequence of corruption practice is that it concentrates wealth in fewer hands and hence widens the gap between the rich and the poor creating discontent among the people, situation which also had large implications for political development.
- xv. Corruption distorts political anticipation, distorts the development of strong political institutions and weakens the national economic base.
- xvi. Corruption distorts the functioning of an economy because it leads government officials to take actions that are not in general interest.
- xvii. Corruption distorts the security level in the society. According to Okorn and Ndum (2020) like other regions of the world, state security is expected to be integrated into legislations dealing with international migrations and external relations, but with the existing level of corruption in Nigeria, this is farfetched.

VI. ROLE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Public Administration has played a significant role in fighting the menace of corruption in Nigeria.

The ambivalent reaction to the epidemic of corruption has been the major concern of some administrators since the time of Independence. According to Ndum and Okey (2013) Good governance, as a concept, is applicable to all sections of society such as the government, legislature, judiciary, media, private sector, corporate sector, trade unions, non-government organisations (NGOs) etc. Public accountability and transparency are as relevant for the one as for the other. The eradication of corruption was among the “nine-point programme of Gowon” without which the 1976 hand-over date would be unrealistic. Indeed, the Public Officer (investigation of assets) Decree was promulgated during the Gowon era. There was forfeiture of corruptly acquired assets by culprits in accordance with this legislation. His regime was however overthrown because of its lack of capacity among other factors to combat corruption.

Gen. Murtala Muhammed’s administration in 1975 would be highly commended for the strenuous efforts made to eradicate corruption. On assumption of the mantle of leadership, Gen. Murtala Muhammed launched a severe attack on the corrupt leaders during

the Gowon's administration. Out of the 12 military governors, 10 were dismissed with the exception of Brigadiers Oluwole Rotimi (Western State), and Mobolaji Johnson (Lagos State), who were exonerated by the probe panel. Also, some civil servants were dismissed on the grounds of looting public treasury.

In same vein, the civilian government of Shehu Shagari launched what it called "Ethical Revolution". It was not successful due to the rising political turmoil between the Northerners and Southerners. General Muhammadu Buhari's administration in 1984 introduced what it called "War Against Indiscipline (WAI). It was aimed at instilling discipline in Nigerians and eradicating corruptions in high and low places.

The Ibrahim Babangida's government came into place, killed the anti-corruption crusade of the Buhari's administration, and did not do so much in fighting corruption, instead, he reinstated the 10 governors who were dismissed during Muhammed's administration, and their confiscated properties were returned to them.

The only effort this regime made was to set up the national Committee on Corruption and other Economic Crimes in Nigeria. The committee came up with the Corrupt Practices and Economic Crimes Decree 1990, unfortunately, in spite of its far reaching provisions; the decree never went beyond the draft stage.

On May 4, 1994, Gen. Abacha served a notice that he would "take on the twin evil of corruption and indiscipline which have greatly lowered our respect. The regime produced a draft of anti-corruption legislation titled indiscipline, corrupt practices and economic crime (prohibition) Draft Decree, 1994.

The enthronement of a democratic government of President Obasanjo marked the emergence of more realistic measures in fighting corruption in Nigeria. In his Inaugural Speech, of May 29, 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo emphasized that "corruption, the greatest single bane of our society today will be tackled head-on at all levels, the beneficiaries of corruption in all forms will fight back, with foul means at their disposal." Thus, Obasanjo on June 13, 2001

signed into law the Anti-Corruption Bill known as Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). The principal objective of the ICPC act is to prohibit and give punishment for corrupt practices and other related offences. It was vested with the powers and duties of educating the public about and against corruption, advising corporate bodies ,private and public on how to abet and detect corruption in their transactions and most importantly "to receive and investigate any report of conspiracy, attempt or the commission of corruption and also to prosecute offenders."

In the interpretation section of the ICPC Act, section 2 expands corruption to include: bribery, fraud, abuse of office and other related offences like illegal dealing, false pretences, gratification, etc. By gratification, the Act understands as "money, donation, gift, loan, fee, reward, valuable, security, property or interest in property etc. given to any person with intent to influence such person in the performance or non-performance of his duties. The point here is that valuables given to another and received by the recipient with the intent to influence the proper procedure of things to one's favour is corruption. As stated in the Act, the fight against corruption is not one-sided. Both parties are involved and punishable. In other words, it considers both the persons who encourage and the others who participate in corrupt practices regardless of their status, ranks, or position.

Again, being supported by the legislatures and key security and law enforcement agencies, he established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) in 2003.

The EFCC has its mode of operation and was empowered by the National Assembly in 2004 with the responsibility for enforcement of all economic and financial crime laws. These include: the laundering (prohibition Act) 2004, the Advanced Fee Fraud and other Related Offences Act, (as amended), the Miscellaneous Offences Act and even laws as the Criminal and Penal Code as they relate to economic and financial crimes. The Commission has taken drastic measures to bring to book corrupt persons in the country.

In addition to the EFCC and ICPC, we still have the Due Process Unit in the Presidency that was introduced by the Obasanjo's administration. Due process ensures that extant regulations are complied with in the award and execution of government contracts.

In 2004, the Nigerian government introduced the SERVICOM, described as a service compact with all Nigerians. SERVICOM is a social contract between the Federal Government and the people. It gives you the right to demand good service. Details of your rights are contained in the SERVICOM charters which are now available to the public in all government agencies wherever services are provided

The war against corruption, with the instrumentalities of the ICPC, EFCC, Due Process and SERVICOM, as established by the Obasanjo's administration informed a strong force during the Yar Adua's administration. In the same vein, effort towards reducing corruption by subsequent regimes is usually anchored on the existing platforms earlier discussed.

CONCLUSION

Corruption, especially in public life has its roots in ostentatious lifestyle, anticipation and envy by those who are less fortunate, high premium placed on material wealth; infused negative values left by colonialism, deplorable economic poverty of the majority of citizens and misplaced understanding of administrative role performance. The less well-to-do take to crooked means of making money because society values wealth without caring for the source of all the money. The general public is also passive in the face of all the corruption because there is no effective means of ensuring accountability; the public does not demand for any accountability because corruption is seen as a way of life. Who do you complain to? The police or judge who takes bribe to subvert justice?

The Nigerian government like other governments of the world should be committed to the task of ensuring proactive approach to internationalisation of the socioeconomic, political and educational dimensions of the nation. This is mostly important in many ways, including: increase in national and international visibility; leveraging institutional strengths through

strategic partnerships; enlarging the academic community within which to benchmark their activities; mobilising internal intellectual resources; adding important, contemporary learning outcomes to student experience; developing stronger research groups and more (Ndum and Udoye, 2020).

The government has not folded its arms on those issues bordering on accountability and corruption. Public administration has contributed immensely in the fight against this menace. This could be seen in the various steps and approaches exhibited by successive administrations to curb this damaging vice. Presently, the war against corruption is mainly anchored on the principles of investigation, arrest, and prosecution of suspected offenders. This can be likened to mowing a lawn. Sooner or later, the grass will grow again. To effectively fight corruption, its roots must have to be uprooted

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made:

1. **Conscientization and Moral Education:** A good, sound and moral education will help our leaders including every Nigerian citizen to be conscious of the fact that we all must put hands together to work towards the progress of this nation. Like Kwame Nkrumah, we need "consciensism", like Plato, we need "moral education",
2. **Payment of Workers' Salaries and Just Wages:** The Government should see to it that the Nigerian workers receive just wages and justly paid their monthly salaries. This will help to reduce the high rate of stealing and defrauding of the nation's funds. Presently, the Jonathan's administration has approved the 18% minimum wage, but it is still awaiting implementation – how long will the workers keep waiting?
3. **Creation of More Jobs:** So many Nigerians are today roaming the streets without jobs. They involve themselves into so many crimes such as robbery, embezzlement, free fraud, kidnapping, etc. in order to survive. This calls for government to expand labour force of the nations by creating more job opportunities.
4. There should be Transparency among Governmental and Non-Governmental Bodies in the discharge of their duties.

5. Presently, the war against corruption is mainly anchored on the principles of investigation, arrest, and prosecution of suspected offenders. This can be likened to mowing a lawn. Sooner or later, the grass will grow again. To effectively fight corruption, its roots must have to be uprooted.

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