

Combating Corruption for Sustainable Develemental Growth in Nigeria:

Exploring the Paradigm of Divine Option

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Abstract: Corruption remains a major impediment to sustainable developmental growth in Nigeria. Attempt by government to curb or eradicate it through agencies like EFCC, ICPC, and others remain a failure. The calamitous effects of years of dictatorial and corrupt governance by successive military and civilian administrations are glaringly shown in the poor state of development in all the sectors of the country's life, especially the level of poverty and low living standard of its people at local, state and federal levels. The need to explore a viable alternative of arresting the tide becomes inevitable. This is what this paper seeks to raise.

Key Words: Corruption; Sustainable Development; Nigeria; Governance

1. INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria, corruption has been identified as the major bane of urgently needed development. Corruption remains the greatest threat to the attainment of sustainable development and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and even to the continued existence of the Nigerian state. As Arowolo (2010) puts it corruption inhibits socio-economic development and denies equitable distribution of wealth and makes sure some sections of the country, which are considered ethnically disadvantaged to remain worst off in the distributive arrangement of national resources. Corruption has proved ubiquitous mixing with individual blood and societal life, where officials not only personalise public office but also personify it.

Corruption affects both developed and developing countries but at different magnitude. The magnitude of corruption is not equal in every polity. Some countries are more corrupt than others. As George Orwell observes in his book, *Animal Farm*: "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" (1996:109) cited in Dike (2003). Recently, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) relieved some of its officials of their posts because they were deemed corrupt. The commissioners of the European Union (EU) resigned because they, too, were found to be corrupt beyond acceptable limits. And quite recently, the Enron Corporation (energy giant) and World-Com (a telecommunication company) in the United States were perceived corrupt because they 'manipulated their balanced sheets, profit and loss account and tax liabilities.' And Arthur Andersen (Enron's accountant) collapsed for greed and fraud, as it was charged with obstruction of justice in connection with the Enron probe (Reuters: June 27, 2002; The Observer (UK),

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June 9, 2002 cited in Dike,2003). These developments and instances show that corruption is a global problem because developing countries as we shall see later in the paper are not spared of this dreaded monster. For instance Achebe(1983:47) rightly observed that corruption in Nigeria has passed alarming and entered that fatal stage; and Nigeria will die if we keep pretending that she is only slightly indisposed.

What is inescapably advanced in this paper is that past attempts by government in curbing or eradicating corruption in Nigeria have failed for various reasons some of which are decay in societal values; political office perceived as primary means of gaining accesses to wealth; the weakness of social and governmental enforcement agencies; lack of strong political or government will in fighting corruption and the absence of a strong sense of national community due to the ethnic diversity of the country. This failure is evident because in spite of the establishment of anti-corrupt agencies and the noise about anti-corruption campaign corruption is still on the increase. We left out the power of gospel of Christ as the most effective instrument against corruption and other social vices in Nigeria. The Gospel is the most pungent and potent instrument that can transform a man and make him do right. In as much as God is left out in the fight against corruption we should expect corruption to be on the increase and in as much as corruption is on the increase the sustainable developmental growth of the country will continue to be a myth and mirage.

For the purpose of exposition the paper is divided into segments. Section one which has been considered already is the introductory part while in section two the nature and statistics on corruption in Nigeria is examined. In part three of the paper attempt by government in combating corruption from 1999-2009 is briefly examined while the paper ends with a disquisition on the paradigm of divine approach as a potent instrument in combating corruption in Nigeria.

2. NATURE AND STATISTICS OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA PUBLIC SECTOR

Corruption is a term that has attracted a lot of definitions and it does seem almost everybody know what the term connote. In its simple form, corruption is the misuse of authority (or one's position) as a result of consideration of personal gains which may not necessarily be monetary (Ikejiani-Clark, 2001). Corruption could also mean a deviation from acceptable norms, values and standard of a society. These two definitions should suffice us as providing an elaborate discussion on the meaning of corruption may not do much good. Besides, this is not the focus of this disquisition.

Statistics on the nature and form of corruption are alarming. As Achebe (1983:53) puts it, corruption in Nigeria has grown enormously in variety, magnitude and brazenness since the beginning of the second republic because it has been extravagantly fuelled by budgetary abuse and political patronage on an unprecedented scale. Two forms of common corruption from Achebe's observation can be identified: political and bureaucratic.

According to White (1982) cited in Ikejiani-Clark (2001) bureaucratic and political corruption weakens governance by making policy makers timid in taking bold steps to reduce excesses of citizens or introduce reforms. As Ikejiani-Clark (2001) aptly illustrates this, an official who has taken ten percent of the values of contract awarded by government, would lack the moral courage to question the contractor if he performs below standard. This may explain why most public projects at federal, state and local levels are either unsatisfactory completed or abandoned altogether or no questions are asked.

Although it will be difficult to estimate in exact terms the amount of money the country has lost through corrupt and sharp practices, it is however believed that trillions of naira has been stolen from the federal, state and local governments' coffers. For instance, Nuhu Ribadu (ex-chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) observed that about \$ 220 billion (about N65 trillion) has been stolen by past Nigerian leaders within the 46 years of independence (Okoi-Uyouyo, 2008). This shows among others that the cost of corruption is great and is "the most threatening danger to stability" and sustainable development in Nigeria. How many of these Nigerian leaders have been honestly brought to book for inflicting grave injury that has bled this country and pauperised its people.

The impact of corruption is evidently seen in the epileptic nature of Nigerian power sector, educational institutions, decay in infrastructural facilities like roads, communications (NITEL is considered a dead public industry), inefficient and ineffective security outfits, and many others. We have presently local government councils that exist only in name not in service delivery. Most local government councils have become a place where the key actors in the system meet at the end of the month to share the allocation from the federal government. The councils are busy in activities at the end of every month and the moment the allocation is exhausted through fictitious contracts the premises are deserted. Primitive accumulation of wealth by key local government officials and many others is now the order of the day so much so that workers are paid half salary, half of half salary in some local government councils of the federation. In some councils workers are owe salary arrears of six or more months. In the face of this, local government staff exhibit ineptitude to work and absenteeism since they have to be on the farms and other businesses to make ends meet. The effect of this is that service delivery of local government councils is affected for lack of commitment and funds to execute public programmes for the transformation of the lives of the rural dwellers.

Nigerian roads are dead traps because of lack of and poor maintenance. Contracts are awarded for construction of new roads and repairs of existing ones without contractors moving to site many months after the award of such contracts. Our borders are so porous to the point that prohibited and contraband goods are allowed into the country. The custom man on the road collect bribe and close his eyes for the smugglers to bring in contraband goods. Corruption is indeed the bane of Nigerian sustainable development. Why is it that with our endowed natural and human resources government has not been able to address the challenge of energy crises in the country? Honestly, there may be other factors responsible for this but at the heart of them all is the problem of corruption. We make bold to say that eradicate corruption in the country and Nigeria will compete favourably with some of the developed countries of the world.

According to Osuagwu (2003), the root cause of corruption in Nigeria is the unbridled crave for "materialism" and "flamboyance". Most Nigerians quantify everything about life in terms of money, property acquisition, and fame, etc. Very few people in Nigeria value honesty, humility and selflessness. For instance, Osuagwu's uncle who was before his retirement the Director of Public Prosecution of the federation was scorned and treated disdainfully by members of his community. They had expected him, as the number three man in the Federal Ministry of Justice, to have built houses in the village, bought fleet of cars, built roads and provided other amenities to his community even with government money. Osuagwu's uncle was a man who while (he was a civil servant) neither bought a car nor built a duplex whether in the city or the village. He was forced to leave his village for private practice in the city because of the attitude of his people.

Therefore to curb corruption in Nigeria the value system that interpret success and achievement in terms of materialism, money, property acquisition and fame must be discarded for a value system that treasure honesty, humility, servant leadership and selflessness. It is the contention of this paper that this can only be possible through a divine transformation of man. It is God who has the ability to transform a man and make him honest, humble and selfless. You may wonder why a robber after serving a prison term of 10 years only ends up in stealing again. Reformation and transformation can only be possible through the power of the Gospel. The revival in Wiles left the prisons empty of prisoners as there were no crime to fight because of the transforming power of the gospel working in the lives of men and women. We need to come to God and ask him for forgiveness and divine assistance and resolve to do that which is right. There is need for a national day dedicated to honest fasting and prayers for this country and its leadership.

There are other issues that we need to take note of in our fight against corruption for sustainable developmental growth in Nigeria. These issues are greed, occultism, unenforceable laws, lack of integrity, lies, affluence, hatred and tribalism. Lies and greed in government circles seem to triumph among politicians and bureaucrats. There is need to collectively fight against greed, occultism in public and private institutions, lies telling among public office holders, affluence, tribalism, hatred and lack of integrity. Come to think about it, why would a man steal government money to build a mansion of fifty rooms in the village or city when he only sleeps in one of these rooms and other rooms may never be put to use in decades even after his death.

3. STRATEGIES OF COMBATING CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA (1999-2010)

Government has not been silent in the fight against corruption in Nigerian public and private sectors. For instant, the Obasanjo Government (1999-2007) established the Due Process Office and other key commissions like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices (and other related offences) Commission (ICPC) in its resolve to curb corruption in Nigeria. Not minding the questions of legality and constitutionalism that have been raised on the establishment of EFCC and ICPC, Obasanjo should be commended for initiating the fight against corruption through these bodies. When he assumed the presidency of the country on May 29, 1999 he revoked all contracts awarded between January to April 1999 by his immediate predecessor, General Abdulsalam Abubakar on the grounds that they were hastily and dubiously awarded (Okoi-Uyouyo, 2008; <http://saharareporters.com/colabubakarumar> 2.php).

It is important to observe that despite these strategies corruption has been on the increase as government officers steal without been made to sincerely face the wrath of the law. Nigeria's position among the most corrupt nations of the world has not changed for the better. The increase in corruption shows among other that these methods of combating corruption are ineffective and need to be visited. According to Dike (www.nigerdeltacongress.com), Nigeria is not one of those countries with a better plan of handling corruption in the world, despite its unending corruption commissions and all the noise made by every administration on the efforts to transform the nation into a corruption-free society.

4. THE PARADIGM OF DIVINE OPTION AS POTENT INSTRUMENT IN COMBATING CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

As noted earlier, Nigerian method of fighting corruption in the private and public sectors have failed to yield positive results as evidently seen in the rising tide of corruption in the country. According to Edet (2009), corruption has increased in Nigeria with the country currently ranking 130th out of 180 countries surveyed in the 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) released by Transparency International (TI). Last year Nigeria scored 2.7 points and took 121st position out of 180 countries but this year the country's CPI score dropped to 2.5 ranking at on the same position Lebanon, Libya and Mauritania. CPI ranks countries in terms of the degree to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians. Nigeria's CPI index in the span of an eight year period dating back to 2001 did not improve until 2006 when it ranked 142nd out of 163 countries. Before then the country ranked second to last for four years consecutively with its lowest CPI ranking in 2001 at 1.0. The first three countries on this year's CPI index are New Zealand, Denmark and Singapore. This inevitably begs for the search of a dynamic option of curbing corruption in the country. It is time to seek for God's intervention in Nigeria case. Corruption in Nigeria can only be eradicated when men and women who have been transformed by God are put in strategic positions. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Men who are transformed by the gospel have conscience and they know too well that they are accountable not just to the people but to God. The solution to Nigeria problem is to get leaders who have the fear of God to man positions of leadership.

History has it that societies like Wales who were visited by God had their prisons empty of prisoners. This is because the revival that broke up in Wales brought transformation of lives in the society so much so that the fear of God was in the hearts of men. The fear of God in the heart of man will drive him to do right.

Sometimes we wonder why men who have embezzled public funds while in office find it difficult to return such monies despite all the efforts of anti-corrupt agencies. The reason is because their consciences are dead and it will take the transforming power of the gospel to awaken such consciences. For illustration of this point I cite two cases. The conversion of Zacchaeus the tax collector from his old way of life when Jesus Christ visited him made him to declare that the half of his goods he give to the poor and that if he has taken anything from any man by false accusation he will restore such the man fourfold(Luke 19:1-10).

Zacchaeus was willing to right the wrong he has done to people as a result of the transforming power of the gospel. What Nigerian anti-corruption agencies can not do to get men to right the wrong they have done to this country the undiluted word of God can do. The gospel if given its rightful place in governance can get past leaders to return all that they have embezzled from government coffers. Another case relevant in driving home our point is the case of a young man who stole a computer system in his place of work and when he was interrogated he denied that he was not the one. But some weeks after the young man was invited to a church service and in that service he surrendered his life to Jesus Christ. On getting home after the Sunday service he could not keep the computer he stole but returned it to the company. When he was asked what came on him he said he was invited to a place and heard the gospel. We can not be wiser than God who has given us the gospel to save us from our depravity. What force could not do on the young man the gospel did it in just a few hours and save the company he works with from further damages.

We left God almighty out of our fight against corruption. He holds the key to the solution of our present challenges. Righteousness exhausts a nation but sin of various dimensions brings reproach. Righteousness at the federal, state and local government levels is required to win the fight against corruption to ensure sustainable development. Put a righteousness man in office to execute a public program for the government and the job will be done provided the funds are released on time.

According to Hagher (2002), a God-centered approach to leadership is the only viable option of leading Africa (Nigeria inclusive) and the world in general out of pervasive poverty, famine, war, sickness, crime, political instability, societal division, violence and death. By implications, the transformation of Nigerian politicians and bureaucrats through a God-centered approach to leadership is imperative if the Nigerian society is to be changed and the conditions of the common man improved.

Let our politicians be transformed and things will be changed at federal, state and local levels. This is important as Hagher (2002: xii) puts it "politics...seems to control everything else" in the country. The search for who leads Nigeria at the federal, state and local levels come 2011 should be with objectivity in mind by projecting men and women who have the fear of God in them and are ready to offer unconditional service that will benefit the country as a whole. Such men will work with the understanding of the words of the preacher:

*For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing,
whether it be good or whether it be evil. ECC 12:14(KJV)*

Nigeria needs transformational and God-centered leaders who are men/women of integrity, unquestionable character, disciplined, visionary, selfless, sacrificial, and have the ability to transform their goals and visions into reality not minding the setbacks on the way. As Hagher (2002) notes, such a leader derives his moral power from God's word and puts God at the centre of all his thoughts, actions and speeches. He knows that someday he will give account of his actions to God after his death.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The questions of corruption and leadership in Nigeria are cardinal in every effort in developing the country. Like Castello (2001) cited in Dike (2003) aptly notes, Nigeria has enough money to tackle its poverty challenges. If the government can win the battle against corruption and mismanagement, the money will start to turn into functioning schools, health services and water supply, thus laying the foundation to eradicate poverty. It is important to also note that the 'mismanagement of public funds' by politicians and bureaucrats and not scarcity of funds that the federal, state and local governments sometimes project, is the main cause of the inability of the government to adequately provide for its citizens.

Anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria will need to network with organizations and individuals who are known for their straight forwardness in their effort to stamp out corruption in the country.

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