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Curbing the Ills of Corruption in Nigeria

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Abstract

The Nigerian State today is suffering from the morbid effect of corruption which has eaten deep into the fabric of society. Corruption is a general concept describing any organized, inter dependent system in which part of the system is either not performing duties it was originally intended to, or performing them in an improper way, to the detriment of the system's original purpose. This is a behaviour which deviates from formal duties of a public role because of private, regarding pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against exercise of certain types of private, regarding influence, bribery, undue influence. Appeals to voters to vote on the grounds of race, caste community, religion, promote enmity because of classes, are all some of the common corrupt practices. Finally, the paper was designed to examine the ways through which corruption in Nigeria could be curbed.

Introduction

In recent times, corruption has reached such an epidemic proportion that something urgent and drastic needs be done before the entire fabric of the society collapses. The newspapers are filled with stories of corruption and successive governments, have taken measures to stamp out this cankerworm. New criminals are taking pains to study the cases of their predecessors in order to avoid their pitfalls, cover identifiable loopholes and perfect previous tactics and strategies. Indeed, it has been said that if Nigerians devote only 10% of the energy and resources they spend on devising strategies for side-

tracking regulations on positive and productive activities, Nigeria would have since achieved unparalleled growth and development.

Good governance guarantees the common good Confucius calls it “public good Aristotle calls it “the good life”, and in Nigeria it is referred to as ‘democratic dividend’. This common good is achieved through the patriotic zeal, effort and contribution of every citizen. Common good is the totality of public goods and services, ranging from good education, functional hospitals, good road networks, stable polity and economy, protection of lives and properties, promotion of human rights, good laws and so on. This, according to Aristotle, is the essence of forming a political society.

This is what ought to be: According to Thomas Hobbes, man selects his private good to the detriment of the public one. The genesis of corruption is from here. Corruption has so permeated the entire socio-political and economic setting that it is now synonymous with our national life. Today, corruption has affected the pursuance of the common good. This paper attempts to advance basic ways to curb the virus called corruption.

Meaning and types of corruption

Corruption is a ‘child’ of every age, it is dynamic and intrinsic though its concept remains relative. Some scholars have attempted to define corruption. For Brooks, corruption is “the intentional misperformance or neglect of a recognized duty, or the unwarranted exercise of power, with the motive of gaining some advantage more or less directly personal” (Brooks 1999:46). Nkom posited that corruption is “the perversion of public office for private advantage” (Akpotor 1998: 145).

Corruption is a deliberate act of indiscipline against the legalized moral norms of the state, and the natural law of justice, as it affects the realization of the common good for the citizens, it is a situation where an individual or a group of individuals, directly or indirectly divert the wealth of the state to his/their personal use.

Syed Hussein Alatas Jenuzed (Gire 2004) itemized seven types of corruption; they are autogenic, defensive, extortive, invective, nepotistic, supportive and transitive.

1. **Autogenic Corruption:** Involves just the perpetrator himself. He capitalizes on the ignorance of others. For such people they are ‘sharp’ and ‘fast’.

2. **Defensive Corruption:** Arises when an individual faces an unpleasant situation and is looking for a way out. This is where bribery comes in.
3. **Extortive Corruption:** Is when a person coercively demands for something in exchange for services.
4. **Investive Corruption:** involves the act of ‘watering the ground’ in anticipation of future favour.
5. **Nepotistic Corruption:** Entails unjustified appointment of friends or relations to public offices in violation of established guidelines.
6. **Supportive Corruption:** Involves actions taken to protect the existing corrupt rulers, to make laws to fight ‘corrupt opponents’, and yet, they themselves are not free from corruption.
7. **Transactive Corruption:** Involves two corrupt minds who willingly agree to be partners in crime provided they are in advantage.

Theoretical foundation of corruption

Corruption is as old as man’s existence, and is one of the global problems that require analysis and possible solution. We will examine two philosophical propositions concerning corruption. The first is idealism which holds that reality is basically mind or spirit. This implies that the material world is a reflection of the mind. Consequently, “the whole reality is the product of the mind which constructs and structures all things” (Omoregbe 1991:122). By implication, “the ideas which people have, determine the way they live and the way their society is organized” (Akpotor 1998:147). Therefore corruption and development of Nigeria is determined by the very nature of our social and prevailing moral values.

Thomas Hobbes argues that man is driven by selfish force. So, corruption is a fall out from this selfish and materialistic make up of man. Right from the first Republic every regime has its own story to tell about corruption. Apart from the ‘fall out’ concept, some people daily perfect techniques of corruption because of pressure from their people. They feel that since the government cannot provide the needed welfare for their people, they can do it in another way.

Karl Marx sees corruption as a consequence of capitalism, where man is completely exploited, oppressed, enslaved and alienated from his labour and natural resources. Karl Marx calls for action that will change such structures.

From the above analysis, idealism tends to see corruption as elite affairs, while Marxism “believes that corruption is a structural problem, derived from the socio-economic organization of society” (Akpotor 1998:152).

How to curb the ills of corruption

Measures have been adopted in the past to fight corruption but the agencies for such measures were equally corrupted. The most recent of them is the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). There among others, have been seen as a way of ‘using justice as a vehicle for political blackmail’ (Director 2002:17). There is the fear that some of the agents of ICPC have questionable backgrounds. This makes corruption more difficult to be controlled. The fact is that “what is morally wrong cannot be politically right”, since “politics is conditioned by ethnics” (Appadoral 2001:10).

Social and economic causes of corruption

(i) Lack of Social Services

The Nigerian government is yet to devise the appropriate mix of social services that will guarantee an average worker a comfortable life at old age or on retirement. The Nigerian worker must strive to build his own house, find his means of transport, look after his health and that of his family, train his children, etc. In discharging these functions, he hardly receives any assistance from the Government or his employer. Yet, his income level is very low to meet his day-to-day requirements let alone have anything to set aside for the rainy day or to provide these things against his retirement. When he retires he is on his own. He has to train his children, feed, cloth and look after their health. Even when he is on full time work, his income is not enough to meet these responsibilities. The situation naturally becomes worse when he retires.

(ii) Large family size

The social habit of having several wives and children whether or not they could be properly catered for, tempt the average citizen to commit economic crimes in order to meet the challenges posed by the many demands of a large family and the pressures from the extended family. Since our culture imposes on us the responsibility for the extended family in addition to those of our

immediate families, some people tend to find unorthodox means of meeting such responsibilities.

(iii) Praise Singing

Our culture recognizes only the rich no matter how he has acquired his wealth he is singled out for praise. Honour and recognition- selected for a string of chieftaincy titles, important streets, schools, hospitals and other public institutions are named after him. On the other hand, the innocent but poor worker is derided and shunned.

A culture which perverts honesty in this way can only actively promote corruption. Unless there are adequate social sanctions for misbehaviour in any society, social values will be discounted and otherwise innocent people will be enticed to join criminals.

(iv) Poor leadership

It is often said that a society mirrors its leaders. Bad leaders will definitely breed bad followers. In a situation where the leaders themselves are corrupt, it becomes extremely difficult, to cleanse the followership of corruption. In fact, there will be no moral justification for the leaders to take actions against erring members of the population.

This unfortunate situation has persisted for very long in this country. When a junior police constable reports” to his boss or has to bribe his boss for “luxurative” postings, what moral justification will that boss have to check corruption among that subordinate? Or when the leaders amass wealth openly through corruption, how can they curb the corrupt excesses of their officials?

(v) Political instability and policy inconsistency

Political instability with its attendant economic instability and inconsistency in our policies encourages all sorts of social problems. For instance, what is the difference between Green Revolution and Operation Fed the Nation, or War Against Indiscipline and MAMSER? These are laudable policies which ought to produce the desired results if they were pursued with vigour and retained by successive Administration, not minding who instituted the reforms. Rather than do that, once there is a change in Government, steps are taken to throw over board such reforms not minding the achievements already recorded.

(vi) Unjust and Inequitable Application of the Law

The corrupt is usually powerful and influential in the society. He has the huge resources to find his way to the echelon of the society. The belief is that he has enough resources to assist him in bending the law to his advantage. He reasons that even if caught, he can also bribe his way through the corrupt society. Consequently, he is tempted to commit crimes and do what he likes.

The Nigerian society has different sets of laws for different groups in the country. For instance, once you are in a position of authority, your kith and kin, and political allies, can get away with anything. This goads people to commit crimes.

This practice has also been responsible for the half-hearted and partial handling of investigations in this country. The lack-luster handling of enquires and the non-implementation of the myriads of reports of Judicial Commissions of Inquiry.

The skepticism of Nigerians about the sense of justice is such that we have come to accept certain people as sacred cows who cannot be touched. In fact, the skepticism is so strong that many Nigerians believe for instance that if the fugitives currently running from the law should return home, they would be received with red carpet while the government and its security agents would feign ignorance of their presence. If the guilty ones at home are off the hook, is it not mere camouflage chasing those out of our reach?

When these happen, what type of signal are we sending to the other Nigerians? Of course, we are telling them that it is fraud and corruption rather than honesty that pays. No wonder, our successive leaders have learnt nothing from the legion of Judicial Commissions set up in this country. Nobody has had the courage to implement their recommendations or punish the guilty ones. Several other reports of enquires set up have never seen the light of day because “sacred cows” are involved.

Conclusion/suggestions

In conclusion, it is worthy of note that since corruption has no physical existence, it is wrong to depend solely on physical weapons to fight it. It requires a persuasive appeal that emphasizes a kind of rethink. One cannot be just without inner conviction and personal efforts.

The suggestions for remedy are straight forward and they follow logically from the causes highlighted above. From my point of view, these are:

- a) The government should provide more generous pensions for workers on retirement. This could be done through compulsory and contributory insurance policies, health insurance should be instituted while education system should be improved. The Educational System of the country presently, is an embarrassment. The situation is frustrating and disappointing.
- b) The enlightened citizen is now mindful of the need for a smaller family size. The government should assist him to achieve this by intensifying its enlightenment programme to spread the gospel of small-size family.
- c) The society should devise a means of applying effective sanctions against the corrupt individuals while recognizing honest virtues. The undeserved recognition often conferred erroneously on the dregs of the society must stop. A code of practice for awarding honours, chieftaincy titles, etc. must be worked out and enforced. A vigorous media campaign for moral rectitude must be embarked upon.
- d) The country deserves a much better leadership than we have had so far. The policy of “chop and let’s chop” is anachronistic. Our leaders must not only be transparently clean, they must be seen to be so. If they live above board, the ordinary citizen will be afraid to behave otherwise for fear of sanction which a clean leader will be strong enough to impose on erring followers.
- e) We must change our patronizing attitude towards the frauds in the society. The image of sacred cows must be wiped out. Henceforth, strong and equal treatment within the law must be applied to all irrespective of religion, tribe and social class. This is the only way people can learn that crimes do not pay.
- f) The practice of shielding crime perpetrators must be stopped. The identity of the suspect should be made public. That makes it difficult for the suspect to use his influence to put a lid on his arrest and so keep his questionable image outwardly clean. This aspect of our legal practice must be re-examined.

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