

Corruption, Accountability and Transparency in the Present Democratic Era (1992 To Date) in Nigeria's Public Service

Hafsah Olatunji

Department of Economics
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Sokoto State University
hafsaholatunji@gmail.com

Umar Muhammed B/Yauri

Economics Unit
Department of General Studies
Sokoto State Polytechnic
Sokoto

Abstract: *In spite of the abundant natural and human resources, Nigeria is still one of the world's poorest nations. The Nigerian economy has been characterized by incidents of crashing industries, failed banks, epileptic public utilities, falling standard of education, inefficient health delivery systems and general lack of confidence in the polity. At the root of all these problems are corruption and managerial ineptitude. This paper seeks to outline the incidents of corruption, accountability and transparency in the present democratic era in Nigeria's public service, examine the latest public reform agenda and suggests effective measures for ensuring successful implementation of the reforms.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria today the expectations of the people both the masses and the elite are not seemingly realized. They can be attained and realized only if we have in place, accountable, honest, just, transparent and committed public sector managers. The public expect that all public sector officials must use available resources judiciously and exclusively for the purpose of achieving economic growth, political stability, provision of basic infrastructure and the winning of respect and confidence for the nation among comity of nations. Nigeria has a wide spread reputation for corruption. In 2000, it appeared at the top of Transparency International's list of the most corrupt countries' and it continues to be regarded as a bastion of fraud, graft, and deceit.

The history of the Nigerian economy particularly with regards to the public sector for the past four decades, has been replete with cases of monumental proportions of fraud and embezzlement. It is against this background that this paper attempts to highlight the dimensional proportion of corruption, accountability and transparency in the present democratic era in Nigeria's public service with a view to suggesting effective measures from successful implementation of government reform agenda.

2. DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

2.1. Corruption

Section 2 of Independent Corrupt practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) Act, defines corruption to include bribery, fraud and other related offences, but in its simplest term it means the abuse/misuse of power and position of trust for personal or group benefit (ICPC, 2005). Perhaps, because corruption has received an extensive attention in the communities, and perhaps, due to the fact that it has been over-flogged in the academic circles, corruption has received varied definitions. Corruption has broadly been defined as a perversion or a change from good to bad.

Specifically, corruption or corrupt behaviour involves the violation of established rules for personal gain and profit (Sen, 1999). Corruption is efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means private gain at public expense; or a misuse of public power for private benefit (Lipset & Lenz, 2000). In addition, corruption is a behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role, because of private [gains] - regarding (personal, close family, private clique, pecuniary or status gains. It is a behaviour which violates rules against the exercise of certain types of [duties] for private [gains] - regarding influence (Nye, 1967).

2.2. Accountability

Accountability refers to the requirement that the government or even government functionaries or ruler to explain and justify its actions to the people (the ruled), Adakai (1993). It also means answerability for ones stewardship. Ibrahim (1998) defines accountability as responsibility or answerability. To be accountable is to be answerable or responsible for the resources put under one's control and for the authority one is vested with. (Kingsley & Howard, 1979).

2.3. Transparency

Transparency refers to the openness in the conduct of business of government and hence, allows access to information and thereby reinforces accountability. Transparency according to Umar (2000) & Julius (1997) is the ease with which an outsider is able to make a meaningful analysis of an organisation's actions, its economic fundamentals and non-financial aspects pertinent to the organization.

3. THE INCIDENTS OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

Corruption which is described as a "social monster" is pervasive and widely spread in Nigeria. It takes varied forms and different dimensions ranging from embezzlement, nepotism, looting, bribery, kickbacks, misuse of office or power and host of other forms of malpractices. Section 2 of the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) Act, defines corruption to include bribery, fraud, and other related offences, but in its simplest term, it means the abuse/misuse of power or position of trust for personal or group benefit (monetary or otherwise). ICPC (2005).

Nigeria has been stigmatized by the international community as one of the most corrupt nations in the world according to Transparency International; rating as outlined in Usman (2006), Nigeria is ranked as the second most corrupt country in the world for three years 2000, 2001 and 2002 consecutively and has maintained that unenviable position. In December 2011, it ranked 143rd out of 183 surveyed countries in terms of public perception of corruption.

Poor and ineffective management of the nation's resources is one of the main causes of poverty in Nigeria. The Nigerian economic resources have been and are still being badly managed by the leaders and those in the authority to control funds. The large scale fraud and corruption which were the features of the administration of the various governments increase the tempo of poverty in the country. Meagre welfare packages for the retirees and some of them died waiting on the line to collect their retirement benefits, Health insurance and housing packages have been eliminated, salaries in some cases have been irregular and civil servant have been known to prepare for their retirements by inflating public projects.

Corruption in Nigeria is pervasive to the extent that public infrastructure and utilities are left un-serviced leading to their ineffectiveness and low productivity. The constraints of corruption led to the low productivity in the productive sector of the economy. Production in agriculture, industry, manufacturing and even commerce, suffered. Consequently, there have been low capacity utilization, high rate of unemployment, poor purchasing power, low GNP growth rate and high rate of retrenchment which are the negative effect in escalating poverty. Corruption undermines democratic institutions, retards economic development and contributes to government instability, attacking the foundation of democratic institutions by distorting electoral processes, perverting the rule of law creating bureaucratic bottle necks whose only reasons for existence is the soliciting of bribes. Economic development is stunted because outside direct investment is discouraged and small businesses within the country often finds it impossible to overcome the "start-up cost" required because of corruption.

Instances abound portraying the extent of corruption in Nigeria. In 2005 for instance, the social monster brought to an end, the ministerial appointment of the then Minister of Education Professor Osuji as a result of his attempt to bribe National Assembly to inflate the budget allocation of his Ministry. In the same vain the then Inspector General of Police Mr Tafa Balogun, was dismissed and jailed as a result of fraudulent acquisition and diverting of public funds into his private account. In 2006 alone, five state governors (of Bayelsa, Oyo, Ekiti, Anambara and Plateau states) were impeached, all in connection with fraudulent acquisition of public fund. A similar show of high level corruption among important personalities in Nigeria is the alleged

fraud against the former People Democratic Party (PDP) National Chairman Prince Vincent Ogbulafor. According to the administrative news update of ICPC, Prince Ogbulafor and four others were alleged to have conspired to steal public funds using fictitious contracts via the National Economic Intelligence Committee (NIEC) contract verification exercise in 2001. They were arraigned at an Abuja High Court on 3rd of May 2010 on 16-count charge of defrauding the Federal government of N238 million. Omonobi, Ige & Nnochiri, (2010). Another dimension to corruption in Nigeria is the lawmakers endorsing about N71 billion self-allocated allowances in the 2012 budget and the National Assembly paying certain contractor in US Dollars and Euros or manipulating contract awards to favour their selfish interests just like the allegation Nasir El-Rufai, former Director-General of the Bureau for Public Enterprises (BPE) made that, the former Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar had corruptly manipulated the NITEL GSM Equipment contract award in favour of Ericsson. Ajayi, (n.d.).

In the course of fighting corruption, the anti corruption agencies have also been infected with dishonest practices and compromised situations, for instance, the case of the Police Pension Fund of estimated N21 billion was allegedly looted by Mr. Maina Abdulrasheed, Chairman of the Pension Reform Task Team (PRTT) and compromised by some staff of EFCC, ICPC, and some top Police Officers managing the Police Pension Fund. Ajayi, (n.d.).

Undoubtedly, Nigeria has huge potentials and resources to afford its people a decent and qualitative life. It has the potentials to make it stand up and be counted as one of the richest and developed countries in the world. Ironically however, Akpa (2003) observes that about 80% of the Nigerian population live in the rural areas where such social amenities as portable drinking water, electricity and motor able roads are non-existent worse more, perhaps Usman (2006) noted that 67 million Nigerians are poor and live on less than one American dollar per day and the country ranks among the most unequal countries in the world. Some development studies and surveys (UNDP rating 2005 and National Bureau of Statistics 2005) have classified Nigeria as a country whose population are in the midst of poverty. It earns 75th position out of 103 developing countries identified with low human development. The country is classified as one of the 30 poorest countries in the world despite its position as the 6th largest oil exporting country. It is the poorest and most deprived among the OPEC member countries (UNDP 1998). The National Bureau of Statistics (2005) put the population of Nigeria living below \$1 per day as 54.4% (68.7million) in 2004. This means that about half of Nigerians were poor. This situation has however worsen, Poverty have since risen with almost 100 million Nigerians living on less than a Dollar a day despite the economic growth, The Nation Bureau of Statistics reported that 60.9% of Nigerians, as of 2010, were living in absolute poverty, a figure which represents about 112.47 million.

4. THE NEED FOR ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE

There has been growing debate on efforts to curb ethical violation in public service in Nigeria, Tahir (2006) outlines the following reasons for the need for accountability in the public service in Nigeria.

1. The increase in the incidence of public officers who have been involved in fraud and impropriety.
2. The growing recognition that unethical practices have contributed to the economic woes in many parts of Nigeria.
3. The growing awareness on the part of the citizens of the activities of government and those in public offices.
4. Pressure exerted by external donors requiring stricter adherence to good governance and accountability in public offices.
5. The need to curtail waste in the running of government activities.
6. The need to conform with the rating standards of international rating agencies such as Transparency International.
7. The need to institutionalize financial discipline as a culture among public office holders.

8. The need to reduce the cost of doing business of governance in Nigeria.

To promote accountability and transparency in the public service government has taken some steps over the years. Ebonyi (2000) outlines the following steps so far taken by the government to ensure public accountability.

- a. Simplification of operating procedures.
- b. Regular inspection and audit of account personnel and equipment.
- c. Computerization of public sector activities such as customs service, E-payments etc.
- d. Introduction of due process in the award of contracts and operation of government activities.
- e. Up-dating of requisite knowledge and skill of public servants through appropriate training programmes aimed at enhancing their performances and hence output.

5. ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE PRESENT DEMOCRATIC ERA – 1999 TO DATE

Although there were numerous allegations of corruption under the present democratic government, the current agenda of accountability and transparency of the government implemented vigorously will bring sanity into the public service.

The National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS) is a comprehensive package of various institutional reforms designed to overhaul the entire social and economic system in the country. Central among the reform instruments are:

- i. Centralized resident due process team (DPT)
- ii. Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit (BMPIU)
- iii. Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)
- iv. Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC)

The overall objective of these reforms instrument is to address the problems of corruption and crime that have eaten deep into the fabric of our national life and tarnished the good image of the country.

The Due Process Instrument is to ensure fiscal and budgetary discipline as well as accountability and transparency in public expenditure. It allows an executive of a parastatal or extra ministerial department to procure goods and services up to a limit of N700,000 through selective tendering contracts worth more than N700,000 and up to N20 million must be approved by the Due Process Team.

Contracts worth more than N20 million and up to N50 million must receive Due Process Certificate (DPC) through the tender board of the supervising ministry of the parastatal or extra-ministerial department. Any contract above N50 million is subject to an articulated process of tendering, screening and selection by the budget monitoring force intelligence which also assesses the competitive cost of every tender before endorsement and certification.

Contracts certified by the unit are forwarded to Federal executive council for award through the supervising ministry. The process seeks to be effective and yielding positive results by minimising fraud through contract award and procurement in public service. It is estimated that the Federal Government has lost N3 billion through lack of proper procedure of contract award from 1980 to 2001 and that BMPIU is said to have saved N102 billion from inflated contracts in the short period of its existence in the same vein, the Due Process Unit is reported to have cleared over 500 contracts submitted. (Tahir, 2006).

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) is a Nigerian law enforcement agency that investigates financial crimes such as advance fee fraud (419 fraud) and money laundering. The EFCC was established in 2003, partially in response to pressure from the Financial Action Task Force on Money Laundering (FATF) which named Nigeria as one of 23 countries non-cooperative in the international community's efforts to fight money laundering. EFCC has recorded some success in destabilising the operation of fuel bunkers which caused the nation to lose the estimated 100 thousand barrels per day and has discovered 4 million Euro scam in the health sector (Tahir, 2006.) It has also apprehended a considerable number of government

functionaries in the last few months, the former governor of Gombe, Nasarawa and Sokoto amongst others for allegation of diversion of public funds.

The Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) was inaugurated on the 29th of September 2000.

Section 6 of the Act confers three main functions on the commission. They are:

- i. To receive and investigate reports of conspiracy to commit or attempt to commit or actual commission of offence as spelt out by the Act and in appropriate cases prosecute the offenders.
- ii. To examine reviews and enforce the corrections of corruption prone systems and procedures of Public bodies with a view to eliminating or minimizing corruption in public life.
- iii. To educate and enlighten the public on and against corruption and related offences with a view to enlisting and fostering public support for the fight against corruption.

Both EFCC and ICPC are empowered to enquire into information petition received and are guided by the principle of confidentiality giving protection to both the accused and the petitioners. Petitions are made orally or in writing. Petitions made orally are reduced in writing and endorsed by the petitioner before it is entered into the register of petition. If a case is established, a charge is drafted with proof of evidence and filed before a designated High Court.

Petitions that do not fall under the offences covered by the commission are forwarded to the appropriate bodies such as the police, public complaints commission, code of conduct bureau, human rights commission etc and the petitioners dully informed.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

No doubt there are many unresolved problems in Nigeria, but the issue of corruption is pandemic and it would not be an overstatement to say the majority of these problems can be attributed to corrupt practises in the country. Nigerian leaders as well as the followers are corrupt, consequently, it has defied all necessary medicines. Causes of corruption in Nigeria are myriad and they have political and cultural variables as reported by Dike, (n.d) stressing that the obsession with materialism, compulsion for a shortcut to affluence, glorification and approbation off ill-gotten wealth by the general public are all surely factors contributing to the persistence of corruption in Nigeria.

It is unfortunate but true that an indication of good life in Nigeria is flamboyant affluence and conspicuous consumption, a life style indulged by only 10% of Nigerians while the remaining 90% live in abject poverty.

To fight corruption effectively and strengthen accountability and transparency under the present democratic government, the following recommendations should be considered.

1. The immunity clause in our constitution should be removed. It makes the ICPC and EFCC **toothless** bull dogs because of their inabilities to bring to the public notice the financial crimes of the chief executives of some state.
2. The Government should be sincere, honest and comply with the rule of its accountability and transparency agenda.
3. The NEEDS managers should device on effective strategy of empowering the poor and unemployed with a view to reducing the level of poverty in the country.
4. The Government needs to reform the Judiciary so that justice can be dispensed, in good time and without fear or favour.
5. The government should be sincere honest and comply with the rule of law in the implementation of its accountability and transparency agenda.
6. The NEEDS managers should devise an effective strategy of empowering the poor and unemployed with a view to reducing the level of poverty in the country.
7. The Government needs to reform the judicial system so that justice can be quickly dispensed.

REFERENCES

- [1] Adakai, F. (1993). Towards Effective Financial Accountability in the Local Govt System in Nigeria. In Clem O. (Eds.) Catalyst for Local Government System in Nigeria. Jos. Machers Publishers.
- [2] Ajayi, F. (n.d.). Fighting Corruption in Nigeria. Retrieved from <http://www.gamji.com/article9000NEWS>
- [3] Akpa, S. C. A. (2003). Measuring Poverty in Nigeria. Oxford, Oxford International.
- [4] Dike, V. E. (n.d).Corruption in Nigeria: A New Paradigm for Effective Control. African Economic Analysis. Retrieved from: <http://www.africaneconomicanalysis.org>
- [5] Ebonyi, O. (2000). The struggle for public accountability through ages. O. Ebonyi, (Eds.) Public Accountability. Nsukka. Uzziboh Publishers.
- [6] Ibrahim, I. (1998). Accountability Policy Making in the Local Govt. in N.O. Isaac, & O.Y. Nuhu, (Eds.) Local Govt Policy Making and Execution in Nigeria. Ibadan. Sam Bookman Publishers. Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC), (2005). Explanatory Memorandum.
- [7] Julius, U.A. (1997). Accountability in Public Service in Nigeria. in B. I. Bello. (eds.) University of Ibadan. Hoyden Publishers Nig. Ltd.
- [8] Kingsley, J.B & Howard, L.E (1979). Public Administration; Balancing Power and Accountability. Oak Park Illinois. More Publishing Co.Inc.
- [9] Lipset, S. M., & Lenz, G. S. (2000). Corruption, Culture and Markets. In Culture Matters. Lawrence E. Harrison, and Samuel P. Huntington, (Eds.), New York: Basic Books. p.112.
- [10] National Bureau of Statistics (2005). The Nigerian Statistical Fact Sheets on Economic and Social Development.
- [11] Nye, J. S. (1967). Corruption and Political Development: A Case-Benefit Analysis. The American Political Science Review. pp. 417-427.
- [12] Omonobi, K, Ige, I & Nnochiri, I. (2010). Arrest Ogbulafor now, says Court. Retrieved from <http://nigerianvillagesquare.com>
- [13] Sen, A. (1999). Development as Freedom. New York: Anchor Book., p.275
- [14] Tahir, A. F. (2006). Corporate Governance and Accountability. Journal of Professional Administration. A publication of Chattered Institute of Administration Lagos.
- [15] Umar, A. (2000). Accountability in the Reformed Public Sector. Kano. Triumph Publishing company.
- [16] United Nation Development Programme (UNDP). (1998). Nigerian Human Development Report. Lagos UNDP.
- [17] United Nation Development Programme (UNDP). (2005). Nigerian Human Development Report.
- [18] Usman, L. K.(2006). Vocational and Technical Education; Pragmatic Approach to Poverty Reduction for Sustainable Human Development in Nigeria. A paper presented at the 2006 Annual Conference at Shehu Shagari College of Education. Sokoto.