

©IDOSR PUBLICATIONS

International Digital Organization for Scientific Research

ISSN: 2579-0757

IDOSR JOURNAL OF CURRENT ISSUES IN ARTS AND HUMANITIES 2(1): 113-120, 2016.

Corruption and Leadership in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects.

Grace Umezurike

Department of Philosophy and Religion Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria.

Email: graceumez@yahoo.com. Tel: +2347033571612

ABSTRACT

This paper aims at exposing the ills of corruption in leadership and suggesting logical prospects for a better Nigeria. Towards achieving this stated aim, the paper employs the philosophical methods of exposition and hermeneutics to understand the degree of harm corruption in leadership has done to Nigeria and prospects for a better Nigeria. The paper studies corruption as abuse, unlawful appropriation, diversion of public wealth or power for some private reasons. It studies the qualities of leadership as following; good character, vision, prudence, exemplary life, integrity, truth/honesty, firmness, good sense of justice, competence, e.t.c. Our finding shows that the history of Nigeria since independence has been a chronology of corruption records both by civilian and military regimes leaving the entire nation underdeveloped. Also, our finding reveals that the government does little to stop this atrocious act of corruption and these leaders go unpunished after swindling the nation's economy. Unfortunately, some leaders use the anti-corruption agencies as political tools to fight their political opponents. For a better Nigeria freed from corruption, the paper insists on the following; change of attitude to public service, confiscation of property of corrupt leaders, prosecution and jail sentences, prosecution of companies used for money laundering and corruption such as price inflation, disqualification of public officers on the grounds of corruption, declaration of assets before and after tenure of political office, sincere investigation panel and avoidance of victimization, national award to public servants who distinguish themselves in honesty and good work attitude, e.t.c. The implication of the study is that when these factors are sincerely applied, corruption would have been purged out of Nigeria leadership system.

Keywords: Corruption, leadership, challenges and public servants

INTRODUCTION

Understanding Corruption and Leadership

Etymologically, the word "corruption" comes from the Greek word "corrupt us" meaning an aberration, decay, pervasion or misnomer. Hence corruption can be defined as the pervasion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour or moral depravity [1]. It is the abuse, unlawful appropriation or diversion of public or other's wealth or power for some private reasons [2]. World Bank Transparency International which is one of the leading figures in anti-corruption crusade defined corruption as the abuse of office for private gains for the benefit of the holder of the office or some third party.

Following the above definitions, corruption can be political, economic, religious, e.t.c. Political corruption can be said to mean unethical behavior that violates the norms of political system or order to the favour or interest of an individual or a group. Also, it can be said to mean unethical behavior designed for power preservation purposes in the interest of an individual or a particular group [3]. Economic corruption is the diversion or embezzlement of private or public fund for personal (selfish) use or purposes for

which it is not made. In the same vein, religious corruption is the abuse of religion. This means some unethical religious practices that are meant for selfish reasons. In all, corruption manifest in bribery, extortion, different forms of harassments such as sexual abuse, fraud, e.t.c. It is undeniable that corruption is a big threat to the act of leadership or governance in Nigeria. It frustrates sustainability in governance, development, democratic process, fair business practices, social order, relationship, security of life and property, e.t.c.

On the other hand, leadership is a process of social influence by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent¹. Also, leadership can be defined as the process of persuasion or example by which individual induces a group to pursue particular objectives. One who makes the said influence is referred as a leader while the people are the led. Leadership involves directing and coordinating the work of a group of members [4]. This implies that leaders are those who are put in charge of a group or number of people. Their main role is to define the goal of the people and ensuring that the people work towards the attainment of such goals. Hence in order to achieve the stated definition, a leader is expected to demonstrate qualities which include but not limited to good character, vision, prudence, exemplary life, integrity, truth/honesty, firmness, good sense of justice, ability to create conditions for the team to be effective², demonstrate competence, temperance, [5] e.t.c.

In the same vein, leadership can be seen from different perspectives such as religious leadership, political leadership or governance, economic leadership, e.t.c. For the interest of this paper, our special concern is on political leadership in which case our consideration is about how our politically elected or appointed office holders or leaders short-change our common interest to their personal gain not minding the corresponding effect on the country and her citizens.

Challenges of Corruption and Leadership in Nigeria

Achebe was right when he claimed that the problem of Nigeria is the problem of leadership [6]. It is quite disheartening that corruption can be said to be a common denominator of Nigerian political leadership since independence. Hence a cursory look at political leadership in Nigeria since independence shows that the political leaders have virulently demonstrated more interest in private, group, ethnic or religious gains than the Nigerian state. It is very unfortunate that the nation Nigeria has had it uneasy with her leaders both the civilian and military since independence. Neither of the two categories that ruled the country has done enough to stop corruption rather they so much encouraged corruption by providing a fertile ground and an environment conducive for corruption to thrive incurably at the expense of national socio-economic, cultural and political development.

Nevertheless, the origin of corruption predates the colonial era. According to a Colonial Government Report (CGR) of 1947, "The African's background and outlook on public morality is very different from that of the present day British. The African in the public service seeks to further his own financial interest." [7] Before independence, there have been cases of official misuse of resources for personal enrichment [8]. At independence, the corruption standard took a higher dimension. Hence in the First Republic under the leadership of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister, and Nnamdi Azikwe, the President, corruption gained a wide spread so much so that Government officials looted public funds with impunity. It was so bad that the Federal Representative and Ministers flaunted their wealth with reckless abandon.

This disheartening situation of corruption led to the provocation of some middle-ranked military officers to the first coup d'état on January 15, 1966. Hence the editorial of the *Daily Times Newspaper* of January 16, 1966 reported thus:

With the transfer of authority of the Federal Government to the Armed Forces, we reached a turning point in our national life. The old order has changed, yielding place to a new one...For a long time, instead of settling down to minister to people's needs, the politicians were busy performing series of seven day wonders as if the act of government was some circus show... still we groped along as citizens watched politicians scorn the base by which they did ascend... [9]

The coup was a success and the popular support the military received from the masses showed that Nigerians were long expecting such a wind of change to bail them out from the claws of the politicians of that era.

This coup brought in General Aguiyi Ironsi's military government. This military regime instituted a series of commissions of inquiry to investigate the activities of some government parastatals and to probe the widespread corruption of the first republic. The commissions of enquiry discovered that very many ministers formed companies which they used their influence to award contracts to themselves in a very high inflated prices especially the Nigeria Railway Corporation, Nigeria Ports Authority, Electricity Corporation of Nigeria, Nigeria Airways, e.t.c. [10]

Unfortunate for Nigeria was the second coup led by Gowon in July 1966 that ousted Ironsi's government. This was unfortunate to Nigeria because she witnessed a quantum leap of corruption as the new set of rulers embarked on white elephant projects, which served as a means of looting public funds. General Yakubu Gowon ruled the country at a time Nigeria experienced an unprecedented wealth from the oil boom of the 1970s. Apart from the mismanagement of the economy, the Gowon regime was enmeshed in deep-seated corruption so much so that by 1974, reports of unaccountable wealth of Gowon's military governors and other public office holders had become headlines in Nigerian dailies [11].

The above unfortunate experience of Nigeria and Nigerians led to the third coup which toppled Gowon administration in July 1975 by General Murtala Mohammed. This was an attempt to end corruption in the public service. General Murtala Mohammed began by declaring his assets and asking all government officials to follow suit. He instituted a series of probes of past leaders especially the Federal Assets Investigation Panel, Belgore Commission of Inquiry, e.t.c. This Panel in 1975 found ten of the twelve state military governors in the Gowon regime guilty of corruption. At this point, the Federal Government forced them to give up ill-acquired properties considered to be in excess of their earnings [12]. Also, the Belgore Commission of Inquiry was established to investigate the Cement Armada and the Commission indicted the government of inflating contracts for cement on behalf of the Ministry of Defence for private gain. Hence the Ministry of Defence needed only 2.9 million tons of cement at the cost of N52million as against their claims of 16million metric tons at the cost of N557 million [13].

General Murtala was assassinated after only six months in office and was succeeded by his Chief of Staff, General Olusegun Obasanjo, who did not follow up his master's zeal in the prosecution of corrupt leaders. It was noble enough that he handed over power to the civilians in 1979 under President Shehu Shagari. This second republic gained greater force of corruption as the President did nothing to stop the looting of public funds by

elected officials. Corruption among the political leaders was amplified due to greater availability of funds. It was claimed that over \$16billion of oil revenue was lost between 1979 and 1983 during the reign of President Shehu Shagari. This fraudulent activity was so heinous that the perpetrators usually set government buildings ablaze making it impossible to discover written evidence of embezzlement and fraud [14].

The weakness of the second republic president to stop corruption led to the third coup of December 31, 1983 by General Muhammadu Buhari. General Buhari's regime promised to bring corrupt officials and their agents to book and as such state governors and commissioners were arrested and brought before tribunals of inquiry.

Unfortunate for Nigeria was the bloodless coup of 1985 by General Ibrahim Babangida. This was unfortunate because it was at this point that the accused leaders during Murtala Mohammed and Mohammadu Buhari regimes found their way back to public life and recovered their seized properties. Little wonder Maduagwu bemoaned this situation thus;

Not only did the regime encourage corruption by pardoning corrupt officials convicted by his predecessors and returning their seized properties, the regime officially sanctioned corruption in the country and made it difficult to apply the only potent measures, long prison terms and seizure of ill-gotten wealth, for fighting corruption in Nigeria in the future [15].

Minding intense public opposition to his rule, General Babangida reluctantly handed over to a non-elected military-civilian Interim National Government on 26th August 1993 which was later ousted from power by the military under the leadership of General Sani Abacha on 17th November 1993. Abacha's regime was no better for Nigerians because it only furthered the deep-seated corrupt practices, which already characterized public life. Under General Abacha, his family and associates made a historical record on corruption that generations of Nigerians unborn will still suffer the effects. It was estimated that the embezzlement of public funds and corruption proceeds of General Abacha and his family amounted to USD4 billion. [16] Little wonder some Nigerians saw his sudden death in June 1998 as a relief to Nigeria.

At his sudden death, Abacha was replaced by General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who subsequently handed over the government to a democratically elected civilian government in May 1999. The Fourth Republic commenced with the election of General Olusegun Obasanjo as the President of Nigeria in 1999 and the list continues through Yar'Adua, Jonathan to Buhari who is the leader of the present democratic government.

It is most disheartening and shameful too that the history of leadership in Nigeria has been a chronology of corruption so much so that corruption seems to be the foundation and essence of governance. Without mincing words, it is not out of place to argue that a careful analysis of all the regimes reveals that leadership and corruption are positively co relational in Nigeria. This argument is based on the fact that almost all the leaders came to power with the sole purpose of enriching themselves and their cronies rather than offering selfless services to the nation and its people. However, the magnitude of corruption during the era of the various civilian and military regimes cannot always be determined with precision because the trend, ways and means of illegal self-enrichment have always gained a quantum leap above the predecessors. Even when each government comes up with the fight for corruption, the fight itself becomes a tool for corruption and hunting their political opponents.

An offensive and obvious manifestation of corruption among our political and economic leaders is the distortion of governmental expenditure. Our leaders are notorious for International money laundering and over invoicing of import and export bills. This often results in diversion of public investment on large-scale projects rather than the provision of necessary public services such as health, roads, housing, and education. The government spends more on large and in most cases, hard-to-manage projects, such as airports or national stadium, to make easy their corruption tendencies. Hence Dike stated that development projects are made unnecessarily complex so as to justify the corrupt huge expenses on them [17]. This situation makes it inevitable for the limited but valuable fund earmarked for development to disappear into private pockets.

Prospects for Corruption Free Leadership in Nigeria.

No doubt stating that corruption is the bane of leadership in Nigeria is to state the obvious. Hence corruption has become the major clog in the quest for sustainable growth and development and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), discouraged foreign investments and reduced the resources available for infrastructural development, abuse of public offices, leaves the poor perpetually disproportionately under-privileged, renders our democracy nonfunctional, e.t.c [18]. Thus corruption has become a singular factor responsible for the failure of governance and holistic development in Nigeria.

Nigeria has been dragged to the mud minding her leadership since independence. Post independence political bureaucratic and military elites had terribly damaged and diverted the nation's common wealth and national patrimony with impunity, there by denying Nigerians access to meaningful living even when the available resources can give Nigerians a good living. Ribadu noted that from independence till the collapse of dictatorship in 1999, Nigeria had spent six times the resources committed to the rebuilding of Western Europe after the Second World War [19] but we have nothing to show for it. The social scourge has given Nigeria a bad image but home and abroad.

It is very worrisome that in spite of our abundant resources, Nigeria remains one of the poorest countries in the world. The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) released annually by Transparency International has consistently listed Nigeria among the most corrupt nations of the world. The 1996 study of corruption by Transparency International and Goettingen University ranked Nigeria as the most corrupt nation, among 54 nations listed in the study [20]. Also, the 1998 Transparency International Corruption Perception Index(CPI) ranked Nigeria as the fifth most corrupt nation out of 85 countries listed in the rating [6]. With \$300 GNP per capita, Nigeria was 164th position in 1999 and 199th out of the 209 countries covered in 2000's World Development Report [9]. The 2001 Corruption Perception Index rated Nigeria as second most corrupt nation among 91 countries listed. [11] The 2002 Corruption Perception Index ranked Nigeria third most corrupt nation out of the 102 countries listed.³Similarly, the 2003 Corruption Perception Index also rated the country as the second most corrupt nation out of 133 countries listed. [14] Although the trend improved a little from the 2005 Corruption Perception Index ratings, Nigeria still languishes within the first ten most corrupt nations of the world.

The most unfortunate is that there is fire on the mountain and no one seems to be running. The situation has become very precarious and so unbearable that there seems to be no hope as every sector of leadership can be said to be on corruption competition. Nigeria has not been able to breakthrough with any significant step towards improving the living conditions of her impoverished population due to the high level of corruption among the political class [4]. Even when supposed solutions to corruption are employed

by the leaders, they abuse such means to become themselves another degree of corruption by hunting their supposed political enemies. The point is that our leaders are well informed and have known what needs to be done to eradicate corruption in the system of governance [9]. Just as already mentioned that there is fire on the mountain but nobody seems to be running as our leaders are so relaxed with corruption minding their personal gain to the expense of the corporate interest of Nigerians. In spite of the knowledge, the situation of corruption in the country grows from bad to worse as orchestrated by crook leaders.

Therefore, we categorically emphasize that corruption must be halted before it shuts down our country Nigeria and to save the nation from international disgrace and national calamity. Different regimes of governance have declared war against corruption but unfortunately the fighters fail on arrival because he who goes to equity must go with clean hands. The fundamental lack in the chronology of corruption fighters is sincerity. Hence the following remedies are suggested as prospects towards eradicating corruption among our leaders.

- Leadership seminars/workshop to help conscientise them on positive virtues.
- Confiscation of property of corrupt leaders.
- Independence of corruption investigation commissions such as EFCC, ICPC, e.t.c.
- Prosecution and jail sentences without cash payment option
- Cancellation of election result when rigged
- Prosecution of companies used for money laundering and corruption such as price inflation, e.t.c.
- Disqualification of public officers on the grounds of corruption
- Declaration of assets before and after tenure of political office.
- Sincere investigation panel and avoidance of victimization.
- National award to public servants who distinguish themselves in honesty and hard work.

CONCLUSION

This paper traced the meaning of corruption to its Greek root as “corruptus” meaning an aberration, decay, pervasion or misnomer. Minding this derivation, corruption is said to mean the pervasion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour, [10] extortion, different forms of harassments such as sexual abuse, inflation of prices, fraud, e.t.c. It is undeniable that corruption is a big threat to the act of leadership or governance. It frustrates sustainability in governance, development, democratic process, fair business practices, social order, relationship, security of life and property, e.t.c [1]. In the same vein, this paper defined Leadership as the act of directing and coordinating⁴ which must be characterized by good character, vision, prudence, exemplary life, integrity, truth/honesty, firmness, good sense of justice, ability to create conditions for the team to be effective, demonstrate competence, temperance, [16] e.t.c.

Also, this paper made a survey of the chronological record of leaders in Nigeria since Independence and the corresponding corrupt practices in their regime. The fact is obvious that there really was never a golden age of great leadership in the history of Nigeria. The lack of integrity and values leading to incompetence has been the bane of the country Nigeria. No doubt, the degree of corruption during the era of the various civilian and military regimes cannot always be determined with because the trend and methods of illegal self-enrichment have always gained a quantum leap above the predecessors such as distortion of governmental expenditure, International money laundering and over invoicing of import and export bills, diversion of public investment, unnecessary and complex development projects and total collapse of ethics [17].

Nigeria is a country that is too rich to be poor but corruption has made us too poor to be rich. Corruption is very obnoxious minding its corresponding effects to our country Nigeria especially; unmitigated poverty, unemployment and disconnection from the international community. Therefore, it is obvious that corruption has become the major clog in the quest for sustainable growth and development. It stands as a challenge towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), discourage foreign investments and reduce the resources available for infrastructural development, abuse of public offices, harms democracy, e.t.c [5]. Thus corruption among our leaders has become a singular factor responsible for the failure of governance and holistic development in Nigeria.

Minding the terrible blow of corruption in Nigeria, this paper is so apprehensive lest corruption shuts down our country. Though different regimes of leaders had declared war against corruption at different times, all to no avail. This attempt has always failed because they lacked the basic and indispensable conditions to fight corruption. These basic factors are complete change of attitude to embrace sincerity, justice and equity. This is obvious because the factor of sincerity is paramount in the fight against corruption and different regimes lacked this factor rather used the different anti-corruption agencies as political tools to hunt their suspected political enemies. This attitudinal change will mitigate government interference in anti-corruption agencies fight against corruption. Amongst very many other things, this attitude will strengthen the government effort towards the war against corruption such as; Leadership seminars/workshop to help conscientise leaders, Confiscation of property of corrupt leaders, Prosecution and jail sentences, Cancellation of election result when rigged, Prosecution of companies aiding corruption, Disqualification of public officers on the grounds of corruption, Declaration of assets before and after tenure of political office, e.t.c. When these avenues are explored judiciously, corruption would have been nipped in the bud and Nigeria freed from its disastrous consequences [3].

REFERENCES

1. Odunuga, (2000), "The Impact of Corruption and Organized Crime on Nigerian Economy and Economic Development". Paper presented at ACDESS
2. P. U. Kalu, *Understanding Corruption and the Nigerian Experience*, (Lagos: Luna Publications, 1999), 12.
3. A. Heidenheimer, and M. Johnston *Political Corruption: Concepts and Contexts*. (London: Transaction Publishers, 1993), 3.
4. J. Coleman, *Nigeria: Government and Corruption*, (Oxford: Oxford University publishers, 1998), 54.
5. M. Chemers, (2002). "Cognitive, Social, and Emotional Intelligence of Transformational Leadership: Efficacy and Effectiveness". In R. E. Riggio, S. E. Murphy, F. J. Pirozzolo, *Multiple Intelligences and Leadership*. (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002), 54.
6. F. Fiedler, *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness* (McGraw-Hill, New York: McGraw-Hill Publications, 1967), 39.
7. Richard, L, Robert C & Gordon J. *Leadership: enhancing the Lesson of Experience*, 4th edi., (New York: McGraw Hill Publication, 2009), 65
8. K. Barbara, *Bad Leadership, What it is, How it Happens, Why it Matters*(Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 65.
9. Chinua Achebe, *The Problem with Nigeria*, (London: Heinemann, 1958), 1
10. R. Okonkwo, "Corruption in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective (1947- 2002)" In *African Unchained*. Retrieved from <http://africaunchained.blogspot.com/2007/09/corruption-in-nigeria-historical.html>. accessed on 21/05/19.

11. B. Storey, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Administration of Lagos Town Council*. (Lagos: Government Printer, 1973), 34.
 12. A. Gboyega, *Corruption and Democratization in Nigeria*. (Ibadan: Agba Areo Publishers, 1966), 3
 13. S. Moore, *Power and Corruption*. (New York: Visions Publications, 1997), 56.
 14. J. Ihonvbere, and T. Shaw, *Illusion of Power: Nigeria in Transition* (New York: Africa World Press, 1998), 24.
 15. K. Guest, (2000). Nigeria Survey of Corruption. *The Economist*, January 15-21.
 16. J. Coleman, *Nigeria: Government and Corruption*, 1998, 54
 17. F. Fiedler, *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness* (McGraw-Hill, New York: McGraw-Hill Publications, 1967), 39.
 18. K. Barbara, *Bad Leadership, What it is, How it Happens, Why it Matters*, 2004, 65.
 19. V. Dike, "Corruption in Nigeria: A New Paradigm for Effective Control". *Africa Economic Analysis*. P. 5 Available at www.AfricaEconomicAnalysis.org. accessed on 23/05/19
 20. N. Ribadu, "Corruption and Survival of Nigeria". Being a paper delivered at the Second Chief Gani Fawehinmi Annual Lectures/Symposium, Lagos, 2007
-