

Institutionalized Corruption and National Development Crisis in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: Globally, corruption has become one of the major threats to development especially in developing societies that lack strong institutions capable of preventing or inhibiting the manifestations of corrupt acts. In Nigeria, corruption has been deeply rooted in virtually all spheres of national life. More worrisome is the degree of rot in many institutions saddled with the duty of combating corruption in Nigeria. The paper argues that the endemic corruption ravaging state institutions in Nigeria is a major threat to national development. We extracted some of the basic propositions of the elite theory as the theoretical guide while utilizing documentary method of data gathering. Its analytical rigour is anchored on qualitative descriptive analysis. It concludes that the elites who manage major state institutions and seem to shoulder the responsibility of anti-corruption fight have remained the major perpetrators of corruption in Nigeria. Hence, ending corruption becomes undeniably not feasible. The paper therefore recommends a paradigm change from the hitherto elitist driven corruption eradication programmes and agencies to more radically independent corrupt institutions that will be capable of penalising all involved in corrupt practices without fear or favour.

KEYWORDS: institution, corruption, national development, crisis

Introduction

Globally, corruption has become one of the major threats to development especially in developing societies that lack strong institutions capable of preventing or inhibiting the manifestations of corrupt acts. Since 1960, when Nigeria became independent, one of the issues that have gained considerable attention at both public and private fora is corruption (Nwanegbo & Odigbo 2015). Earlier, Akindele (2005) has aptly demonstrated through a retrospective analysis of politics from independence to date that corruption has permeated so deep into the fabrics of Nigerian society. In Nigeria, corruption has been deeply rooted in virtually all spheres of national life. More worrisome is the degree of rot in many institutions saddled with the duty of combating corruption in Nigeria.

Thus, prior to the return to civilian rule, there seems to be a convincing impression that the recurring incidences of corruption in Nigeria is as a result of inexperienced and dictatorial tendencies of military juntas. The popular view was that the military was not trained to rule, hence the slogan “return to barrack”. The return to civil rule in 1979 demonstrated in concrete ways that corruption is not mutually exclusive to military or specific military juntas. In other words, the military is the product of Nigerian society therefore their administrative traits cannot be dissociated from the character of society that trained them. Hence, the succeeding civilian government in 1979 led an era of corruption bedevilled haemorrhage economy. For instance, Ribadu (2006) termed the period between 1979 and 1998 “the darkest period” in Nigeria’s history of corrupt regimes. For him, the civilian administration of 1979-1983 was bedevilled with profligacy, “wanton waste, political thuggery and coercion...disrespect for the rule of law...bare faced, free for all looting of public funds through white elephant projects” (cited in Fagbadebo 2007, 30-31).

Indeed, optimism was upbeat in 1999 with the return to democratic governance but whether this optimism is well founded remains to be seen. The Obasanjo led government established anti-craft agencies to curb corruption. These agencies include the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC). Although, these agencies have superintended the detection, arrest and prosecution of many individuals accused of corrupt related practices, yet corruption in Nigeria and more specifically in state institutions is growing daily in a geometric ratio. As a result, national development appears to be a mirage. This study therefore examines institutionalized corruption and the extent it impacts on national development in Nigeria.

Conceptualizing Corruption and National Development

There seems to be a global consensus among scholars that corruption is a major impediment to governance and development. This consensus points to the fact that corruption is a global phenomenon. Corruption of course is a universal problem, with complex causes; its net effect is commonly regarded as negative for all societies, especially developing countries (Ghana Center for Democratic Development 2001). More importantly is to state that in spite of its universality, manifestations, tendencies and complexities of corrupt practices vary across borders. For instance, the rate or rather the occurrence of corrupt incidences varies from developed and undeveloped societies. The sophistication to carry out corrupt practice is also not same. This is because technological inventions and strong institutional mechanisms capable of detecting and punishing offenders exist and are more effective in developed societies than the underdeveloped. The level of literacy and public awareness towards resisting the temptation of corrupt practices are also not same. Thus, the pervasiveness of corruption tends to make it a household concept as it traverses all nooks and crannies of every society though at different magnitude (Odigbo 2017).

Thus, Al Gore argued that corruption is “a cold, vicious, often violent sacrifice of citizen security for a narrow, greedy, private, personal profit on the part of a crooked official” (cited in Iyare 2008, 4). For United Nations Development Programme, UNDP (2004) stated that corruption is the misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit-through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money or embezzlement (cited in Nwabughioqu 2016). Incidentally, corruption has become a common word and has become part of everyday usage in Nigeria. In fact, in Nigeria corruption has become a household name hence, it appears to have been integrated into the national life.

Thus, Huntington (1968), the concept is seen as abuse of public office for private ends. For him, corruption is a behaviour of public officials which deviates from accepted norms in order to serve private ends. Although, Jean-François (1998) argued along the lines that corruption in Africa is closely associated with neo-patrimonialism and clientelism, and that the basis for the entrenched corruption in Africa is mainly the lack of distinction between public and private (cited in Andvig J, Fjeldstad O, Amundsen I, Sissener T and Søreide 2001). However, it is important to note that such distinctions exist but more importantly is to state that ethnic and religious affiliations tend to have impeded the capacity of African societies and her people from abhorring corruption in both public and private space. This is Africa’s and indeed Nigeria’s greatest challenge. It is big problem because corruption promotes economic decay and social and political instability, perverts the ability of the state to foster rule of law and eventually corrodes trust and undermines legitimacy (Ghana Center for Democratic Development 2001). It has been institutionalized to the extent that families, communities and the entire sub-societies find reasons for justifying any alleged corrupt act perpetrated by indigene(s) of their own extraction.

The above explanations undoubtedly have severe implications on national development of a state. Studies on development have continued to explained that man is the subject and object of development, hence the assumption that development is all about human well-being (Naomi, 1995; Gboyega, 2003; Nwanegbo & Odigbo 2013). Specifically, development is usually taken to involve not only economic growth, but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life (Naomi 1995). Thus, Gboyega (2003) explains that development is an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. It implies improvement in material well being of all citizens, not the most powerful and rich alone, in a sustainable way such that today’s consumption does not imperil the future, it also demands that poverty and inequality of access to the good things of life be removed or drastically reduced.

It seeks to improve personal physical security and livelihoods and expansion of life chances. For Nwanegbo & Odigbo (2013) development could be seen as the process of empowering people to maximize their potentials and the ability to exploit nature to meet daily human needs. It can also be

seen as a process by which quality of human lives and capacity to surmount daily needs are considerably improved.

Following from the above, national development entails an ensemble of sustained improvement in the political, social, economic, health, and environmental aspects of any organized political society. It explained the degree by which state transformation is coordinated and sustained. This can be in terms of state capacity to systematize the process production, allocation and distribution of social goods for the betterment of man (Odigbo 2017). According to Onuoha, (2013, 18) the concept of:

national development, depicts unending process of qualitative and quantitative transformation in the capacity of a state to organize the process of production and distribution of material benefits of society in a manner that sustains improvement in the wellbeing of its individual members in order to enhance their capacity to realize their full potentials, in furtherance of the positive transformation and sustenance of their society and humanity at large.

As can be seen, if corruption undermines collective necessities through the abuse of public office for private ends, there may be no doubt that developing the socio-economic and political spheres will suffer a huge setback. For instance, nations with strong government institutions, less corruption incidences tend to experience steady and rapid development, unlike nations with huge corruption incidences. Africa and Nigeria in particular appears to have made little or no improvement in the areas of national development, but has made tremendous improvement in establishing corruption as a national guide. In fact, in some instances national awards are given to highly corrupt individuals who have demonstrated disservice to the people while in public office. In Nigeria, there seems to be no punishment for corruption. What amplifies corruption in Nigeria is that punishments have been substituted for praises and national awards for individuals alleged to have engaged in corruption acts. The implication has being the ever growing unemployment, insecurity, economic hardship, poverty that under-develop the already under-developed Nigerian society.

Corruption and National Development Crisis

There is no gainsaying the fact that corruption impedes national development. However, our contention in this study is that institutionalized corruption in Nigeria has stalled national development trajectories, hauling national development to a crisis status. Arguably, corruption has over the decades in Nigeria appears to be more institutional and political in nature. This is because the ruling class has proved to be the major promoters of corruption, indeed; the continued high prevalence of corruption in Nigeria is as a result of the fact that beyond institutional weaknesses, leaders seem to have infiltrated escaping roots in the making of anti-corruption laws (Nwanegbo & Odigbo 2015). As a result, political corruption has been on its peak with overwhelming monumental negative effects and consequences in Nigerian political system (Nwanegbo & Odigbo 2015). For instance, over a decade Nigeria has always been rated very high among the globally most corrupt nations as rated by the Transparency International. The table 1 and figure 1 below show that between 1996 and 2018 the Transparency International has rated Nigeria high among most corrupt States in the world.

Table 1. Nigeria's corruption perception index by Transparency International from 1996 to 2018

Year	Nigeria's Score	Nigeria's Position	Total number of Nations Surveyed
1996	0.6	54	54
1997	1.7	52	52
1998	1.9	81	85
1999	1.6	98	99
2000	1.2	90	90
2001	1.0	90	91
2002	1.6	101	102
2003	1.4	132	133
2004	1.6	144	145
2005	1.9	152	158
2006	2.2	142	179
2007	2.2	147	180
2008	2.7	121	180
2009	25	130	180
2010	24	134	178
2011	24	143	182
2012	27	139	176
2013	25	144	177
2014	27	136	174
2015	26	136	170
2016	27	136	176
2017	28	148	180
2018	27	144	180

Source: Author's compilation from TI website

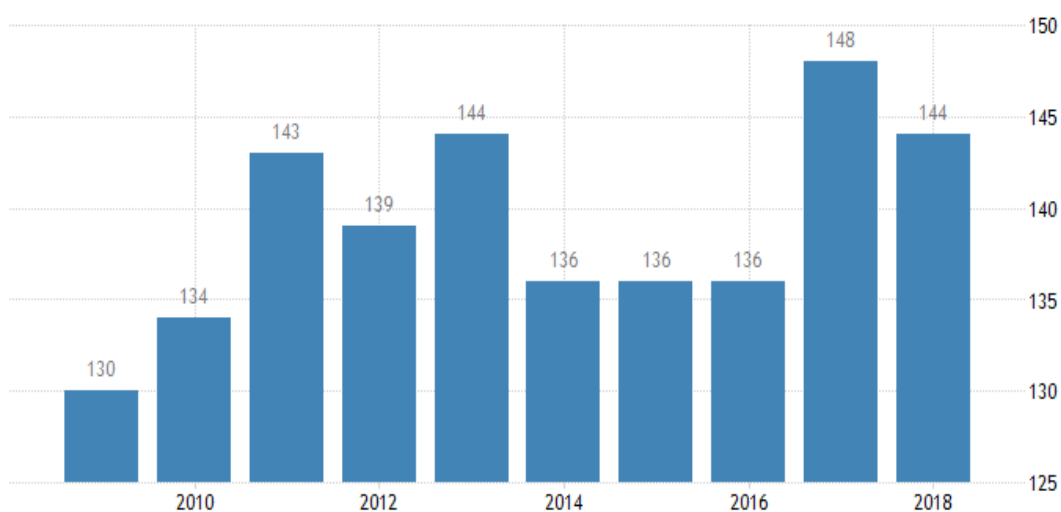


Figure 1. Graphic Representation of Nigeria's corruption perception index by Transparency International from 2009 to 2018

Source: <https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/corruption-rank>

Unfortunately, the more corrupt practices increase, the more development plans are in disarray. Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has developed more than eight development plans. None of these plans has ever been implemented to the benefit of the people. Some of the notable developmental efforts of various governments in Nigeria since independence according to Sanusi (2012) are:

- First National Development Plan (1962-1968);
- Second National Development Plan (1970-1974);
- Third National Development Plan (1975-1980);
- Fourth National Development Plan (1981-1985);
- Structural Adjustment Programme;
- Vision 2010;
- National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS);
- Vision 2020, and a host of others.

Thus, since the discovery of oil in large quantity in Nigeria development plans appear to be tied on the oil economy. Incidentally, the “oil boom and burst” experiences of the 1990s till date impacted negatively on the economy. Beyond this challenge, it seems clear that high incidences of political corruption, enabled by weak state institutions tend to undermine the whole essence of national development. Yet, every past military junta and all civilian regimes claimed to be fighting corruption in public institutions.

Most disheartening is the gullibility of the majority of Nigerian people. Secondly and perhaps more importantly is people’s poor orientation and misconception that when property acquired illegally with public fund is confiscated by the agencies of government, it means the government is winning the war on corruption. Also, when looted funds are being recovered, it means corruption will come to an end. Experiences of the years have shown that looted monies are been recovered and re-looted the incumbents.

As a result, national development has not become only elusive but has degenerated to crisis level. For instance, since 1999, Nigeria’s key indicators to national development still show a low level of improvement. It appears that there was no forward or backward shift from the 2014 Nigeria’s 152nd position in the 2016 report of the African Human Development Index, HDI, released by the United Nations Development Programme, (UNDP). According to the report, Nigeria’s HDI value for 2014, according to UNDP’s 2015 report was 0.514 which put the country in the low human development category, positioning it at 152 out of 188 countries (Nwabughio, 2016). According to Bertelsmann Stiftung, Report (2015) Nigeria’s human development index score as of 2015 was 0.459 which puts Nigeria on position 156 out of 169 in the country ranking. According to the report:

There is widespread and deep-seated social exclusion, caused by poverty. The HPI is 0.368, which translates into a ranking of 114 out of 135 countries. More than half of the population of 170 million lives on less than \$2 per day. Nigeria’s Gini Index is 42.9, the gender equality index gives a value of 0.39 and the inequality index 0.246, while the education index is 0.422 and the literacy rate is put at 60%. Inadequate education is reflected by very poor scores of just 0.648 and by a school enrolment of 53%, although government expenditure on education is 10% of the current annual budget (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2015, 13).

Similarly, unemployment rate is growing rapidly. Just very recently, the African Development Bank stated that unemployment situation in Nigeria is frightening and could become catastrophic if decent jobs are not created for the country’s youth population (Ihuoma, 2019). According to the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria has some of the highest unemployment and underemployment rates in Africa, put respectively at 23.1 percent and 20.1 percent (Ihuoma, 2019). The figure below shows Nigeria’s unemployment rate between 2016 and 2018.



Figure 2. Nigeria's unemployment rate between 2016 and 2018

Source: <https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/unemployment-rate>

From the figure 2 above, unemployment has doubled in Nigeria from 10.4 to 23.1 between 2016 and 2018. While these figures seem frightening, the reality is more pathetic. This is because the greatest undoing of the Nigerian State is providing accurate data for national planning and development. Issues concerning information for national planning are ethnically, politically or religiously doctored. This known fact also has negative impacts on national development because data is indispensable for planning. Unsurprisingly, poverty and insecurity have also risen to assume a monstrous status. The implication is more corruption, more abandoned national plans, more under-development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

From the above analysis, we have established that though corruption is a global phenomenon, its impact on nation's quest for development varies. Thus in Africa, corruption has become a monster. In Nigeria, it has become a way of life and its pervasiveness has stalled national development plans. The endemic corruption ravaging state institutions in Nigeria is also a major threat to national development. Noticeably, the growing poverty, unemployment and insecurity have snowballed into national development crisis. The paper therefore recommended a paradigm change from the hitherto elitist driven corruption eradication programmes to more radically independent and strong corrupt institutions that will be capable of penalising all involved in corrupt practices without fear or favour. Also, important is the development and strict implementation of national development plan that can address the issue of poverty, unemployment and security.

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