

## Corruption in Nigeria: A Daunting Challenge for the Attainment of Sustainable Development

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### **Abstract**

Corruption is one the plethora of vexing challenges which are adversely inhibiting the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria and this is because of the fact that it is a social problem that has excruciatingly eaten deep into the fabric of the nation and the only way forward is to persistently fight the scourge of corruption with a strong vigour so that a monumental sustainable development can be achieved in the country. This paper specifically focuses on the notifiable factors responsible for the corrupt practices in Nigeria. Some of the factors comprised lack of patriotism and nationalism, inequitable distribution of resources, lack of ethical standard and transparency in public and private sectors, weak institutions of government as well as the conflict between changing moral codes. However, the consequences of corruption on the Nigerian social structure have also been vividly elucidated in the paper. These include inter alia mass poverty, decaying infrastructures, deprived dividends of democracy, poor investment and tarnishing the image of the country. It is strongly recommended in the paper that the Nigerians should have unbreakable faith and absolute fear of God; severe punitive measures should be imposed on the corrupt offenders; more social welfare services should be sufficiently provided by the government; both the government and the masses as well as the traditional leaders should unflinchingly co-operate and work harmoniously in the fight against the scourge of corruption in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** *Corruption, Sustainability, Development, Change*

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## **Background to the Study**

Nigeria is a developing country of the world which is unfortunately characterized by the scenario of corrupt practices. Corruption has become the order of the day which is ultimately appreciated as a socially approved norm by the majority of the masses in the country who blindly and immorally think of becoming rich overnight. Corruption virtually, permeates the sectors of the country's economy – education, health, industry, law, security, etc. All the three tiers of government in Nigeria which consist of the Federal, State and Local Government levels are adversely affected by the corrupt syndrome and it is also glaring that corruption is an ill which destructively kills the faith and morale of the Nigerian society. This is epitomized by the fact that most of the people in Nigeria strongly attach great value to financial success whereby a very large number of the citizens in the country are desperately struggling to succeed in life by legitimate or illegitimate means so that they can be held in high esteem by the society. The genesis of corruption in Nigeria emanated from the time that the country attained her political independence in the year 1960 but it was not exceedingly high as it is today. This was because of the fact that the pioneers of Nigerian leadership were people of proven integrity, honesty and progress who worked strenuously towards the tremendous socio-economic and political development of the country as a nation. As the time went by, the gross practices of corruption culminated in the occurrence of numerous obnoxious social problems in the country such as poverty, unemployment, religious/ethnic conflicts, the Boko Haram saga in the north eastern states of Borno, Yobe, Adamawa etc., the cattle rustling in Zamfara and other neighbouring states where many precious lives and highly valued properties were irreparably lost (Akanbi, 2005).

The paper therefore, begins with the conceptual discourse of corruption and sustainable development and it is also supported with a theoretical framework of Structural Functionalism in which greater emphasis was placed on the concept of “Social Control” developed by Talcot Parsons, one of the founding fathers of sociology. This is with the view of gaining a clearer understanding of the paper. However, the factors which are responsible for the corrupt practices, the consequences of corruption on the Nigerian social structure, the conclusion and recommendations have also been extensively discussed in the paper.

## **Conceptual Discourse**

### **Corruption**

The conception of corruption is wide because it has been defined by many different scholars from different perspectives. The term corruption has been defined as the abuse of public or entrusted power for the benefit of a group to which one owes allegiance (Akanbi, 2005). Similarly, Werling 1992, conceived corruption to be illegitimate use of power for private end. Corruption has also been seen as a deviation from the normal duties of a public role for private pecuniary or status gains (Girlling, 1997). However, the International Monetary Fund 2000 defined corruption as “an abuse of authority or trust for private benefit and is a temptation indulged not only by public officials but also by those in position of trust or authority in private enterprises or non-profit organizations” (IMF, 2000). Seidman (1974) maintained that corruption was the invocation of private viewing consideration in public decision making. In addition, Gboyega 1996, perceives that corruption involves the giving or taking of a bribe or illegal acquisition of wealth using the resources of a public office or the existence of discretion.

From the foregoing, the distinct views and opinions expounded by scholars on corruption indicated that it is an abysmal behavior which is not socially approved by the society because it is a social malaise which terribly disrupts the societal activities in the attainment of sustainable development in Nigeria. It therefore, requires a holistic intervention of both the government and the governed so that it can be adequately fought with a strong vigour. As a result of the pervasive nature of corruption in the country, it is sometimes referred to as the “Nigerian factor” by the Nigerian themselves. The former Central Bank Governor of Nigeria Sanusi Lamido Sanusi averred that Nigeria was a country characterized by the culture of impunity which was a serious challenge that has more harmful effects than the corruption in the country and he further noted that corruption was a universal problem. However, Sanusi maintained that although Nigeria had achieved certain economic improvements, poverty was still high because certain fundamentals such as infrastructures were not sufficiently put in place stressing that as soon as those critical infrastructures were profusely secured, Nigeria would begin to benefit from the macroeconomic stability (Sanusi, 2013).

### **Sustainable Development**

The concept of sustainable development is very crucial here as it becomes a common catch phrase of many nations and states who are assiduously aspiring to progress most particularly in the contemporary modern era of globalization. The concept of development is also relative because what is perceived as development in one society may not be a development in another society. It entails so many things as the subject of development is multi dimensional and multi disciplinary (Alanana, 2006).

Development is broadly defined as a multi dimensional process of change in the social structure, attitudes, institution as well as the general acceleration of economic growth through reduction of inequality and poverty (Todaro, 1977). Development is also primarily concerned with increasing the ability and widening the distribution of basic life sustenance such as food, shelter and protection, raising the level in addition to higher income; provision of jobs; better education and greater attention to cultural and humanitarian values all of which not only serve to enhance material well being but also to generate greater individual and national self esteem and expanding the range of economic and social choice to individuals and nations by freeing them from the servitude and dependence (Musa, 2002).

Furthermore, development can also be seen as the process of harnessing the human resources in order to conquer the environments for the betterment of the people in line with its values, customs, and traditions. On the other hand, the concept of sustainable development has been defined as the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs” (Bruntland Commission, 1987). In another definition by Munasinghe 2004, sustainable development is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potentials over sustained period of time while maintain the resilience of economic and environmental systems. Age (2005) also identified some objectives which sustainable development is anticipated to realize: increase capital income and employment; promoting human welfare and satisfying basic needs; protecting the environment. The

sustainable development covers immensely all aspects of human life. These comprise social, political and economic aspects such as education, health, infrastructures etc.

However, according to Todaro (1977), there were indices of measuring development which were critically essential. The first index of development is the improvement of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which entails total output produced in the economy over a long period of time. The second is improved standard of living which is basically concerned with the availability and accessibility to essential requirements of life – housing, food, healthcare, education, infrastructures etc. The third index is improved lifespan and here, lifestyle connotes life expectancy which varies from one country to another ranging from 40 years in most developing countries and 75 years in developed nations. Todaro also further stressed that other indices of development were reduction in poverty, creating employment opportunities and increased literacy level and education. The reduction in poverty involves the fight against absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty entails lack of resources for basic sustenance and relative poverty refers to lack of resources in comparison to other members of the society. In Nigeria, for example, it can be critically asserted that the level of unemployment is exceedingly high because there are millions of people who are incapable of sustaining their livelihood and it is therefore, the responsibility of the government to strategize measures in order to ensure that the teeming youths are adequately employed so that they can offer their own quota to national development. However, low level of illiteracy and education are also other formidable challenges which are posing threats to the attainment of sustainable development in the country. The intensification of quality education and the consolidation of our core values are some of the strategies which can be appropriately deployed by the government in order to remedy the situation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper was underpinned with “Structural Functionalist Theory” which is one of the classical theories in sociological studies that can adequately provide explanations on the issues and challenges of corruption especially in Nigeria. The structural functionalism is a theory propounded by prominent scholars such as Spencer (1897), Durkheim (1947), Parsons (1937), Merton (1947) and others.

The fundamental assumption of structural functionalism is that, it sees a society like a biological organism which is made up of different parts that are interconnected and interdependent with one another and whenever a change occurs in one part, the other parts would be affected leading to the collapse of the whole social system if adequate measures are not employed. The human society, for example, consists also of different sectors such as education, health, politics, industry, law, agriculture and the rest which are fundamentally important and in a situation, whereby one sector of the society is affected, the other parts are likely to be adversely affected leading to poor development and progress in the society. Something therefore needs to be done to restore normalcy in the society.

It can be clearly understood that the Structural Functionalism as a theory is too broad to be applied here because the proponents of the theory offered different explanations on it. For that

reasons, the author of this paper decided to specifically focus attention on the “Social Control” which is a concept developed by Parsons who was an American Sociologist. According to Parsons, social control refers to the social processes by which the behaviour of individuals or groups is regulated since all the societies have the norms and rules governing the conduct of the people (Scott and Marshal, 2005). With regard to the Nigerian situation, it can be said that corruption is a very serious social problem which deters the progress and development of the country and for that reason, the application of social control is needed in order to create an atmosphere of a robust development. Therefore, the services of agents of social control such as the police, the lawyers, the prison warders etc. are highly required on the corrupt offenders in the country so that prosperous socio-economic and political development can be sustainably attained in Nigeria.

### **Factors Responsible for Corruption in Nigeria**

Nigeria is a country that is culturally heterogeneous because it is a conglomeration of people with varied socio-economic and political backgrounds who need to blend their thoughts, ways of life and also sink their differences for the successful attainment of sustainable development of the country. It is very disheartening that corruption is a daunting challenge which is excruciatingly impeding the development of socio-economic and political landscapes of Nigeria as a nation. According to Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC, 2005), there were numerous factors responsible for corruption in Nigeria viz:

**Lack of Patriotism and Nationalism:** Both patriotism and nationalism are the core values which are greatly desired by every nation or society and this is because of the fact that they are tremendously significant. Patriotism denotes love of one's country and willingness to defend it and to be patriotic entails expressing a great love of our country. Nigeria, for example, is our dearly loved country and being patriotic is a pre-requisite for actualizing our dreams for sustainable national development. Nationalism is a desire by a group of people who share the same race, culture, language etc. to form an independent country and it can also be described as a feeling of love for and pride in a country. Within the context of Nigeria, it can be asserted that the term nationalism can be referred to as the desire for Nigerians to get the best for our country so that Nigeria can become prosperous and powerful (Omolewa, 1991). Lack of patriotism and nationalism are the vexing challenges which destroy the glory and honour of Nigeria which as a result of that, many Nigerians indulge in committing corrupt practices that are disastrous for the country's future development.

**Inequitable Distribution of Resources:** As a country, Nigeria is vastly endowed with huge natural resources – human, agricultural, solid mineral, atmospheric and water resources and if these natural resources can be efficiently and effectively, utilized, there can be a colossal industrial and economic development in the country. Unfortunately, it is glaring that the Nigerian political leadership does not give room for the judicious utilization of resources which is because of the desperate desire for corruption. Winning elections and getting appointed to public office is today regarded as a means of getting rich because election in Nigeria for example is characterized by massive riggings from the Second Republic to the present democratic dispensation which is also another factor which motivate many politicians to mobilize

resources in order to achieve power by all means. In addition to that, Otite( 1982), observed that at independence and after, politics became an economic resource, a main ladder for creating and maintaining patronage/clientage relationships. He further stressed that the party politics became a way of material acquisition of achieving prestige without emphasis on obligations and duties.

**Lack of Ethical Standard and Transparency in Public and Private Sectors:** These are also other factors that are responsible for corruption in Nigeria. Ethics is the science of morality (Crowther, 1995) and the maintenance of ethical standards is something we need in our country Nigeria because it encourages us to be co-operative and trust one another, thereby working assiduously towards the socio-economic and political development of our country. Transparency on the other hand, has to do with an act of being honest, trustworthy and hardworking in the discharge of duties that can help enormously towards the development of the country. The critical issue we should understand here is that, both the ethical standards and transparency are lacking in Nigeria and it is also this condition that makes us to engage in corrupt practices thereby destroying our norms, values, customs and traditions. Many Nigerian people have lost faith due to the harmful nature of corruption which adversely affects almost all the sectors of our economy-education, health, industry, judiciary, agriculture, politics etc.

**Weak Institution of Government:** When it comes to policy formulation which is for the betterment of the masses, Nigeria is one of the countries which are good at that but it is the implementation of the policies in to practice that is the problem. Most of the policies of the government are rendered ineffective by the leaders. The Federal Government of Nigeria has been making gigantic efforts towards fighting the menace of corruption through agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (E.F.C.C.) and the Independence Corrupt Practices Commission (I.C.P.C) which are the institutions of the government that have been rendered weak through inadequate budgetary provisions, release of funds, the executive control and interferences etc. (Obayelu, 2007).

**Conflict between Changing Moral Codes:** There used to be conflict between the changing moral codes in Nigeria. Nigeria is a kind of nation which places emphasis on materialism and financial success which as result of that, many people struggle by all means (legitimate or illegitimate) to get rich over night. Observations made it crystal clear that the people who are rich are given respect and recognition which give them the impetus to consolidate their position while the other members of the society who fail to succeed in life, face some challenges such as social stigma and rejection. As a result of that, they devise various illegitimate means of survival such as stealing, armed robbery, fraud and other criminal breaches of trust which are extremely devastating to life. Corruption in Nigeria has been legalized in a manner that no matter how extremely bad a person is, he/she can be respected because the level of impunity is high. The glorification of ill-gotten wealth by the general public is part of the reason for the persistent practice of corruption in Nigeria and this is in view of the fact that the corrupt Nigerians are now honoured with the traditional titles and national awards (Ribadu, 2007). Other instances of corruption in Nigeria were the cases of Tofa Balogun who was prosecuted on 70 count charge of money laundering pursuant to section 14(1) of the money laundering

Act 2004 which as a result of that, he was convicted and jailed for six (6) months. There was also the case of the former Senate President Chief Adolphus Wabara who was indicted by the Senate for allegedly accepting bribe of N55 million from Professor Fabian Osuji, the former Minister of Education in order to increase the budget of the ministry. It should however be noted that the process of “plea bargaining” which the prosecutors do for the defendant to plead guilty, has been criticized by the advocates of justice because it gives the subject the chance of paying fine instead of going to jail to serve as deterrent to others (Nlerum, 2009).

### **Consequences of Corruption on the Nigerian Society**

Corruption is a serious problem with so many unpleasant consequences on the Nigerian society and it may be as a result of the fact that the level of impurity is high in the country.

The following are some of the consequences of corruption:

**Mass Poverty:** One of the major consequences of corruption in our country Nigeria is mass poverty. It is crystal clear that the concept of poverty is relative because what is perceived as poverty in one society may not be a poverty in the other. Aigbokan (2002) defined poverty as “the inability to achieve a certain minimal standards of living”. The supply of food, shelter, clothing and education which are considered as the basic necessities of life to be possessed by an individual in the society are the minimal standards of living here. The practice of corruption has contributed in worsening the level of poverty in Nigeria and this is because of the facts that there are millions of masses who are living in unpleasant conditions as it has been observed by Dike (2003) that some political parties and those elected to manage the affairs of the nation do not represent the interests of the populace but rather engage in bribery and corruption which cause poverty. However, it should be noted that poverty is a serious challenge which hinders sustainable national development in Nigeria considering the fact that when the masses are in poverty, they can engage in criminal activities such as theft, armed robbery, fraud etc. which are social evils and can adversely affect the lives of many innocent citizens.

**Decaying Infrastructure:** The infrastructure is concerned with the basic systems and services that are necessary for a country or an organization which include for example, buildings, transport, water, power supply and administrative systems. As a result of the institutionalization of corruption in Nigeria, many infrastructures are in a state of decay and a good example is the educational sector in the country where facilities such as classrooms, libraries, laboratories, water and sanitation were in deplorable condition (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). In the health sector, for example, the buildings of the hospitals and other facilities are not in good condition. All the examples cited are as a result of corruption. This also creates a situation whereby there is no conducive atmosphere for learning and development in our institutions of learning resulting in falling standard of education in the country and in addition to that, more and more people are dying in the hospitals as a result of poor health conditions which urgently need to be given adequate attention by the government.

**Deprived Dividends of Democracy:** The deprived dividends of democracy are part of the consequences of corruption in Nigeria. Within the context of this paper, the dividends of democracy are the things which the citizen of a state or country are expected to enjoy for their

betterment and these include accessibility to education and better health services, the provision of potable drinking water, good motorable roads, the adequate supply of food, shelter and clothing. All those facilities which are expected to be enjoyed by the citizens of Nigeria are seriously lacking as a result of corruption and mismanagement of resources. According to Ibrahim (2003), the Nigerians have not actually witnessed any improvements in their standards of living since the inception of civilian administration in 1999.

**Corruption Affects Investment, Economic Growth and Government Expenditures:** There are many foreign investors that want to come to Nigeria and do solid investment that can enhance economic growth and development in the country but they find it difficult to do that due to corruption which fuels insecurity in the country. It is also this condition that makes them to feel scared. Other issues are the government expenditures. There used to be some cases whereby the Federal Government of Nigeria utilized certain amount of money for capital projects or other services which were beneficial to the masses, but the money would be siphoned off or mismanaged in such a way that no meaningful development could be achieved in the country. Therefore, corruption discourages investment and limits economic growth (Epple, 2006).

**Tarnishing the Image of the Country:** Tarnishing the image of the country is also another factor which can be considered as the consequence of corruption in Nigeria. As it is all known, Nigeria is a country which is abundantly blessed with huge natural resources and it was able to produce many scholars of international repute who worked in different parts of the world and performed excellently which as a result of that, their efforts and hardwork were appreciated by the nations they served. Some of those scholars include Wole Soyinka , Chinua Achebe, Jibrin Aminu, Prince Bola Ajibola to mention a few. In the business scene, many Nigerians performed wonderfully most particularly in Europe, America and Asia. Unfortunately, one thing that is worrying us is that, the image of the country is tarnished. Many nations of the world have lost confidence in Nigeria. This is as a result of corruption which is a social problem impeding the socio-economic and political development of Nigeria as a nation and for the country to develop, all hands must be put on deck to fight the scourge of corruption.

## **Conclusion**

From the foregoing discussions in the paper, it is crystal clear that corruption is a social ill as it has been indicated by scholars from different perspectives. The different sectors of the economy in Nigeria such as education, health, agriculture, industry, the law or judiciary etc. have also been adversely affected in such a manner that there was no meaningful development but thanks to the current “Anti-Corruption Crusade” initiated by the government of President Muhammadu Buhari with the view of bringing about sanity in the country. The conceptualizations of corruption and sustainable development have been clearly spelt out in the paper and there was also the theoretical framework where the Structural Functionalism was deployed focusing attention on the social control, a concept developed by Parsons. However, the factors responsible for corruption were also discussed in the paper. These include lack of patriotism and nationalism, lack of ethical standards and transparency in public and private sectors, the weak institutions of government and conflict between changing moral codes.

Lastly, the consequences of corruption on the Nigerian social structure were however discussed about in the paper and they comprised mass poverty, decaying infrastructure, deprived dividends of democracy, poor investment, economic growth and government expenditures as well as tarnishing the image of the country.

### **Recommendations**

Based on all the fundamental issues discussed in the paper, the following are the recommendations.

1. It is strongly recommended in the paper that the Nigerians should have unbreakable faith and fear of God as there are different people with different religious beliefs such as for example, Islam and Christianity where the adherents are preached to be morally good. Here, the culture of hardwork, dedication, patience and perseverance are indispensable.
2. There is the need for the Federal Government of Nigeria to take effective measures to fight against corruption in Nigeria through the institutions such as Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (E.F.C.C.) and Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (I.C.P.C.) and they should also be strongly reinforced by the government. The intensified efforts of the current administration of President Muhammadu Buhari in Nigeria of initiating “Anti-Corruption Crusade could be considered as a laudable objective of moving the country forward.
3. There is the need by the government to provide adequate social welfare services such as the supply of food, shelter, clothing, education, health etc. and the youth should also be provided with job opportunities after graduation from institutions of learning such as the universities, colleges of education and polytechnics. The vocational and technical skills which they acquired can help them to be self reliant and offer their contributions to the development of the country.
4. The fight against corruption is not only the responsibility of the government alone as the traditional leaders and the masses are also anticipated to work harmoniously and cooperatively towards eradicating or minimizing the level of corruption in the country so that progress and development can be achieved.
5. Lastly, the religious leaders such as the Malams and Pastors have fundamental roles to play in the fight against corruption in Nigeria because they are role models who can bring about positive changes in the society. They can also do that by teaching and preaching in magnificent places such as mosques and the churches where the masses can be easily called to order so that they can do the right thing for the general development of the society.

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