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Edited by: JUSTUS A. SOKEFUN

CHAPTER TWO

CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: A SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE*

INTRODUCTION

The society exists to benefit all people, irrespective of race, colour status and ethnic background. It is moulded by people and it also moulds people inhabiting it.

For the continuity of society, people enter into various relationships. In the widest sense, these relationships include every kind and degree of relationship entered into by men and women, whether or not these relationships are organised, direct or indirect, consciously or unconsciously entered into, cooperative or antagonistic. They include the whole tissue of human relations and without boundary or assignable limits.

Society's continuity can also be viewed from the fact that individuals or groups possess reciprocal expectations concerning the other's behaviour so that they tend to act in relatively patterned ways.

* Dr. Patrick Edewor, H.O.D. Sociology Dept., and Mr. Eniola Sokofun, Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria.

It is against this background that society can be said to be the "web of social relationships". Social because it relates to people in society.

Over the years, scholars in sociology have continually theorized on ways through which society can develop, given the numerous interactions, which are entered into by the specie called Homo Sapiens or human beings.

It was discernible that these various interactions occasionally bring about problems of the survival of society and people as a whole. These problems, which are regarded as social problems, rear their ugly faces in the society and they constitute a threat to the survival of people in a geo-political boundary.

Social problems are numerous and they have been defined variously by scholars in sociology. Paul Horton and Gerald Leslie¹ defined a social problem as a situation which exists, when a significant number of people, or a number of significant people, perceive an undesirable difference between social ideals and social realities and believe that this difference can be eliminated by collective action.

¹ Paul B. Horton and Gerald Leslie Sociology of Social Problems. N. Y. Random House, 1967, p.61

In their own definition, Robert K. Merton and Robert A. Nisbet² both prominent scholars in the field of sociology, conceived social problems as conditions growing out of human interactions that are considered undesirable by a significant number of people who believe they can be resolved through preventive or remedial action. According to Harold Phelps³, social problems can be classified into four. These are economic sources, which include unemployment and population explosion, biological sources which cover abortion, homosexuality and infertility, psychological sources, which include neuroses, feeble-mindedness and alcoholism and finally, socio-cultural sources cover divorce, juvenile delinquency and crime. The theme of this paper, is located or classified under crime. It is a social problem because it is defined as such by a significant number of people and it constitutes a threat to the corporate survival of any society. It hinders the development and growth of any nation.

CORRUPTION: A CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION.

The word "Corruption" as a political economic concept has, before now, been viewed as a factor within several other socio-economic

² Robert K. Merton and Robert A. Nisbet. *Contemporary Social Problems* N. Y., Harcourt Brace & World 1961. p.92

³ Harold Phelps. *Social Problems* Engle Wood Cliffs, 1976. p.74.

factors that could be a menace to development. It may appear as a monster hindering socio-economic and political development of a nation state. Corruption can be defined as an unscrupulous, immoral or dishonest behaviour in society. It includes fraud, shadiness, bribery, extortion, wickedness, iniquity and perversion.

Corruption is world-wide, but prominent in countries of the third world, particularly in African continent Ackerman⁴ pointed out that widespread corruption is a symptom of a poorly functioning state and a poorly functioning state can undermine economic growth. Where corruption is situated in the structural nature of any society, countries with extensive natural resources may fail to develop in a way that benefits ordinary citizens.

Corrupt situation exist when things, goods or services are exchanged, or market tendencies exist under circumstances that are considered contrary to the known rules, norms, conventions or legally accepted conditions. Conceptually, corruption is a crime, committed in society and it is a deviation, from the norms accepted by people in society.

Corruption is a disintegrative social factor which often prevents social, political and economic development of a nation, just as poverty works against enduring democracy. Where corruption

⁴ Ackerman s. Corruption; Catalyst and Constraints: Annual World Bank Conference on Development, 1997, p.28.

persists, there can never be any meaningful development and where it increases daily, development should be seen as a forgone issue. It is against this background that the present administration promulgated the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act (the Anti-Corruption Act 2000), in order to have good governance and to realize significant development, rooted in high standard of integrity openness and transparency in the Public Sector. This Act covers all facets of society and all people, regardless of status and position.

ANTI-CORRUPTION ACT⁵ AN OVERVIEW

Nigeria as a nation has a written constitution, federally conceived as an instrument for the smooth running of the society. Years back, the Penal and criminal codes existed for the Northern and Southern States of Nigeria respectively and the code of conduct to a considerable degree penalized corruption by public officers.

The Motivation for a new legislation like the Anti-Corruption Act was borne out of the fact that the criminal and penal codes are largely outdated. Thus, in terms of concept and punishment, they are inadequate responses to the diversity and degree of corruption in the 21st century.

⁵ Anti – Corruption Act 2000, Act of the Federal Republic of Nigeria

The Anti - Corruption Act established an independent commission which shall not, in the discharge of its functions, be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority and be vested with the power to investigate corrupt practices. It is an autonomous commission headed by a chairman. The Commission was established as an autonomous body separate from the police. It has the power to seize the asset or freeze the accounts of individuals who are found guilty of corrupt practices.

The Anti-Corruption Act, 2000 highlights the following:

1. Offering and accepting gratification (official corruption; sections 8 and 9);
2. Fraudulent possession or acquisition of property (section 12 and 13);
3. Making false statement or return,
4. Bribery (giving and accepting);
5. Dealing with property fraudulently or wrongly acquired (sections 24); and
6. False or misleading statement to the commission or frustrating the commission's investigation (9section 16 and 25)

The Act also punishes an attempt as well as agreement to commit any of these offences. The Act criminalizes the failure to report

bribery on the part of the giver or promisor on the one hand and the receiver or promisee, on the other.

From the Act, any person who corruptly asks for, receives or obtains any property or benefit of any kind for himself or for any other person or agrees or attempts to receive or obtain any property or benefit of any kind for himself or for any other person, is guilty of corruption and shall be punished accordingly.

According to the Act, on account of anything done or omitted to be done or for any favour or disfavour already shown to any person by himself in the discharge of his official duties or in relation to any matter connected with the functions, affairs or business of government department or corporate body or other organization or institution in which he is serving as an official or anything to be afterwards done or omitted to be done or favour or disfavour to be afterwards shown to any person by himself in the discharge of his official duties or in relation to any matter as aforesaid is guilty of an offence and is liable to imprisonment for 7 years.

Given the provision of the Act above, it can be said that the Act is not restricted to the public sector even though it is described as official corruption. Under this Act, some measure of mental culpability is needed to secure conviction, with the key concept being the receipt or giving done corruptly and a person to whom a

summon is addressed shall comply with it, otherwise he may be arrested and detained. The Act gives the commission power to investigate, search and seize property of all persons or corporate bodies connected to any case of corruption.

CORRUPTION: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Corruption as a social problem is a deviant behaviour and it is a violation of the norms of society. The Anomie Theory⁶ articulated by Robert. K. Merton will be used as a theoretical framework for corruption in this presentation.

Merton, a prominent sociologist, posited that deviance results not from 'pathological personalities' but from the culture and structure of society. He begins from the standard functionalist position of value consensus, that is, all members of society share the same values. However, since members of society are placed in different positions in the social structure, they do not have the same opportunity of realizing the shared values. This situation, therefore, generates deviance. In Merton's words, 'the social and cultural structure generates pressure for socially deviant behaviours upon people variously located in that structure'.

⁶ Anomie Theory. Robert. K. Merton, 1968, p.85.

Merton identifies two issues central to any society and its development. These issues are the cultural goals and institutionalized means. According to Merton, members of society appreciate the cultural goals, for example, success, wealth and power and also believe that, there are institutionalized means of achieving these cultural goals. Some of these institutionalized means are educational qualifications, talent, hard work, ambition, drive and determination. In a balanced society, an equal emphasis is placed upon both cultural goals and institutionalized means, with members satisfied with both.

When members of society conform to the norms and values of society, in pursuing the cultural goals, through the institutionalized means, society develops rapidly for the benefit of all. In order words, there is progress, peace and the sustenance of social order in society. But a situation of anomie or lawlessness occurs, where members accept the cultural goals, but fail to accept the institutionalized means. In order words; people in society believe in wealth, but are not particular about acquiring wealth legally. To them, a means is legitimate in as much as the end justifies the means. For such people, wealth can be accumulated through corruption, ritual murder, embezzlement and many other vices inimical to human society.

Given Anomie Theory, corruption is a bane in any society, where members of such society believe only in the cultural goals, but find it difficult or impossible to accept the institutionalized means. To this end, people recklessly give and accept bribe, make counterfeit documents to defraud the government and corporate bodies and demand for illegal favour in the course of interacting with one another in society.

Merton ends his analysis by outlining five possible ways in which members of society respond to success goals. These are: The conformist (The most common) who conforms to both success goals and the normative means of reaching them; the innovationist, whose response is to reject normative means of achieving success and turns to deviant means, particularly crime; the ritualist, who abandons the commonly – held success goals, though believing in the institutionalized means; the rebel who rejects both the cultural goals and institutionalized means, striving hard to create a new society through the organization of resentful and rebellious revolutionary group and finally the retreatist (least common) who has strongly internalized both the cultural goals and normative means, yet is unable to achieve success.

CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: CAUSES AND SOLUTION

Corruption and embezzlement of public and private funds have become a way of life of the people in Nigeria and many countries in the African continent. Corruption is also associated to the tendency of African leaders both in public and private organizations in their desire to seat tight to power, in order to cover up, their various corrupt practices. In this type of situation, selfless service is no longer a virtue.

CAUSES OF CORRUPTION

The causes of corruption can be found in the following:

Poor leadership, insatiable desire for materialistic acquisition by Nigerians, general increase in the prices of goods and service, lack of job security, inadequate distribution of rewards and wealth of the nation, occasioned by social stratification, lack of public awareness of the negative effects of corruption in the process of nation building.

The issue of poor leadership has in recent time been the major problem facing the polity of Nigeria as a nation. With the military junta having dominated the political structure of the nation since independence, the nation has been bedeviled by leaders who are not

accountable to the people, by virtue of ascending to such positions by military fiat.

To this end, a leader who sees himself only being able to maintain the position for a short time, sees the opportunity to accumulate wealth by all means possible. This also transcends the followership who also, in most cases, are in the majority.

Apart from the problem of leadership, a very important cause of corruption is rooted in the job insecurity and lack of future prospects of lives of individuals in society.

As a result of economic depression, individuals are faced with growing uncertainty and a reduction in life chances. As such, any means through which this problem can be solved even through corruption will be welcome.

Furthermore, the rising cost of goods and services in the country has also become an issue of great concern and a sure cause of corruption. In order for the citizens to survive and live a comfortable life, individuals throw morals into the lagoon, in a bid to acquire wealth, for themselves and generations unborn.

SOLUTIONS TO CORRUPTION

Since the causes of corruption can be found in the socio-cultural nature of society and corruption being a social problem, its solutions can be found in the systemic arrangement of society.

The following are the solutions to corruption

1. Good leadership
2. Creation of employment
3. Reduction in poverty
4. Provision of infrastructure
5. Provision of unemployment benefits
6. Enlightenment campaigns

Given the numerous consequences of corruption to the development of a nation, any reasonable nation must address the issue of leadership. With a good leadership that is accountable to the people, there will be smooth running of government and the sustenance of political stability, which will attract investors, both local and international into the country, thereby creating employment and reducing crime such as corruption.

The government may also provide unemployment benefits to her citizens who are without jobs

In doing this, her citizens will appreciate government efforts towards alleviating poverty and such citizens will put in their best

in developing the nation when in future, they are in a position of authority.

Government should act as a matter of urgency in intensifying campaign against corruption, making people to realize the negative impact corruption has on the development of a nation.

Finally, government and the organized private sector should provide adequate infrastructure for the population. For instance, when the citizens can own houses at affordable prices, and educate their children at reasonable cost, many a people will not see the need for accumulating wealth.

CONCLUSION.

The society is a system, with individuals interacting, to give meaning and form to the social structure of society. All parts of society are interrelated and interdependent, to the extent that a faulty part, creates a problem for other parts. Sociologists have identified five main parts of society. These are the family, which is the basic unit in society, the polity, economy, education and religion. Though, other parts like kinship, marriage, hospital, military can be distilled from the five main parts or institutions, a malfunctioning of the polity or economic sub-system creates a threat to the life and survival of society.

Corruption being the result of human interactions in society is a social problem which can hinder the development of a nation. It can lead to many other social problems such as poverty, other types of crime, unemployment and dependency. To this end all hands must be on deck to eradicate corruption in our society for the benefits of our generation and the generations yet unborn.

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