

Corruption in Nigeria: Developing an Ethical Mind-Set for Accountability

Usman, Joshua¹, Santas Tsegysu², Mustafa, Lynda Jummai³
1.department Of English, Ibb University, P.M.B. 11, Lapai - Nigeria.
E-mail: usmanauta@yahoo.com

2.department Of Mass Communication, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai
Email: tsegysu2000@yahoo.com

3.department Of English, Sps, Ibb University, P.M.B. 11, Lapai - Nigeria.
E-mail: mustafalinda99@gmail.com
Corresponding author: usmanauta@yahoo.com

Abstract

This article is a brief reminiscence of the state of corruption in Nigeria and the way forward. The paper bleeds for sincerity of purpose, genuineness in the course of leadership in Nigeria and clamours for a remedy in order to achieve a progressive and not a retrogressive society. At the end, sincere and honest solutions are being offered for the future of the country.

Keywords: Corruption, Development, Ethical, Accountability.

Introduction

In the present globalizing world, the issue of integrity, whether in public sector or personal in affairs is increasingly in demand. Qualities such honesty, fairness firmness, objectivity, dedication commitment and transparency are key demands on individual, institutions, government professionals and students for true developments, even in international politics and business. Conversely, vices such as corruption, fraud, bribery, favouritism, lying, discrimination and dishonesty, are condemn as anti- development (Adegoke, 2002). Corruption in Nigeria is endemic. The viral nature of corruption in Nigeria calls for the issue of integrity, morality and self-discipline because of high level of corruption that has become an endless social ill and a disgrace to Nigerians in the face of international community and globalisation.

The Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index 2011 has ranked Nigeria 143th of 183 countries. The index scores 183 countries and territories from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (very clean) based on perceived levels of public sector corruption. It uses data from 17 surveys that look at factors, such as enforcement of anti-corruption laws, access to information and conflicts of interest. Two thirds of ranked countries score less than 5. Nigeria scored 2.4. Ghana is ranked 69, with a score of 3.9. South Africa is 64, with a score of 4.1. New Zealand, Denmark, Finland, Sweden and Singapore occupy the first five slots. In 2013, Nigeria remained at the bottom of the heap on the global corruption index, having been ranked the 35th most corrupt country in the world by Transparency International (TI).

In its 2012 report released by the Washington DC-based body, it was indicated that Nigeria scored 27 out of a maximum 100 marks to occupy the 139th place out of the 176 countries surveyed in the report. The global watchdog, in a statement yesterday, said: "Corruption continues to plague too many countries around the world. It shows some governments failing to protect citizens from corruption, be it abuse of public resources, bribery or secretive decision-making. (This Day Live Newspaper, 6th, December, 2012)

A widely agreed structural factor underlying corruption in Nigeria is the political system which violates the Rule of Law and Fundamental Human Rights as a result of an inordinate amount of power vested in the hands of the executive, and the president in particular. The principle of Separation of Powers has been compromised. And as such, there is no balance between the executive, legislative and judicial arms of power. Commentators differ in the emphasis they give to other factors which characterise the environment of corruption. Lopa (1998) highlights the greed of those in positions of power, who are often already wealthy individuals, combined with a weak system of law enforcement where investigations are poorly carried out and few prosecutions are made. Gross financial mismanagement is a cause and consequence of this situation. Rose-Ackerman (1997:19-20) argues that incentives for corruption are provided by the high level of funds and resources under the discretionary control of officials, combined with poor formal laws on corruption, the lack of credibility of law enforcers, and the poor conditions of civil service employment. Other contributing factors include the limited extent of auditing and monitoring within government, the lack of public awareness of government activities and a tendency not to file complaints, the low level of press freedom and the controls preventing individuals from forming non-government organisations, and the poor level of active political opposition.

Conceptual Framework

Some relevant concepts such as **ethics**, **public sphere** and **public opinion**, are hereby clarified for better understanding.

Ethics

Ethics is a moral concept. There is a consensus among philosophers that ethics is synonymous with morality and both involve human action (conduct, behaviour) (Pratt, 1988). The word 'ethics' comes from the Greek word 'ethos' which means character, while the word 'morals' comes from the Latin word 'moralist' which means custom or manner (Okunna: 2003). For a long time, the issue of ethics was tied directly to religion but such philosophers as Aristotle and Immanuel Kant have succeeded in producing ethical philosophies that are independent of any religion. However, the issue of what the ideal or good life should be has led to emergence of different schools of thought not only in the definition of ethics but also its understanding and categorization (Joseph 1973:3).

According to Frankena and Granrose (1974) "ethics" 'stands for a branch of philosophy or philosophical thinking about morality and its problems'. Ethics as moral philosophy is therefore; that branch of knowledge which is concerned with the standards of good or bad conduct in the society, using societal norms as a basis for the evaluation of human conduct or behaviour (Okunna Op cit). Allen and Voss (1997) also document the following conceptions about ethics.

- It is the art of setting standards of conduct and making moral judgments (Jimmie Killingworth).
- The study of the principles of conduct that apply to an individual or a group. The principles are rights, justice and utility (Mike Markel).
- To be ethical simply means to follow the laws and that concern for the consumer and citizen should remain foremost in relation to business.
- Ethics according to Omole (2000) as cited by Okunna (2003:2) is defined as "the shared normative values, which any society holds dear and are used to judge the behaviour or performance of any member of a society. It sets out the minimum of acceptable behaviour which any member should attain to be regarded as a good ambassador of that society".

Because ethics is concerned with such concepts as virtue and vice, right and wrong, good and bad, responsible and irresponsible, a study of the ethics is a study of all those rules and guidelines which are designed to regulate the actions of human beings as they make moral decisions. As such, answering the question of ethical compliance by public office holders in order to enjoy public trust and confidence cannot be overemphasized. Religious leaders and the media (especially, private media houses) principally perform their fundamental duties to ensure among other things, societal integration and cohesion, make government and its agencies accountable to the society as well as attaining societal sanity and development.

The Public Sphere

In the analysis of great German Scholar, Jurgen Habermas, the concept of public sphere directs attention to the historical evolution of the democratic role of the press in the society at large. As recorded in the pages of much literature, the practical reality of this concept came into being in England, France as facilitated by the print media especially the newspaper.

Putting into proper conception, Oso (2011) cites McQuail (2010) and Granham (1986) who both conceptualize thus:

The public sphere is described as a space between the economy and the state providing an autonomous and open forum for public debate. Access to the space is free and freedom of association and assembly is guaranteed. The basic principles underlying the constitution and functioning of the public sphere include "general accessibility especially to information, the elimination of privilege and the search for general norms and their rational legitimation.

Oso op cit also notes that the concept of public sphere attracts the attention of Calhoun (1982) who pointed out that a public sphere adequate for a democratic polity must meet two requirements; quality of discourse and quality of participation. Individuals participate in the public sphere on the basis of equality; in principle it was open to all, "membership of the public sphere being conterminous with citizenship". These two requirements according to Schudson (1992) are central. "It is not just that people must participate but the quality of such participation and involvement is also as crucial" (Oso, 2011). It is on the basis of this that Habermas' theory stresses the importance of rational-critical discourse in the public sphere. Having become the main institution of the public sphere, the press is expected to function "as an instrument or a forum for the enlightened, rational, critical, and unbiased public discussion of what the common interests were in the matters of culture and politics" (Gripsund, 1992, p.89, cited by Oso, 2011, p.3).

It then goes to show that mass media and media practitioners as well as journalists are key players within the framework of public sphere. In actual fact, much is expected from journalists in this situation as

correct, true and undistorted information must be made available to all members of the public without discrimination. This therefore calls for high degree of objectivity, fairness, sense of responsibility and accountability. But where unethical practices such as brown envelope syndrome, moonlighting, junketing, PR-journalism are all in the centre stage, the public will be the victims.

Public Opinion

According to Hornby (2000, p.,942), public is 'a group of people who share a particular interest or who are involved in the same activity'. Public according to Salu (1994) as quoted by Raufu (2005:17) is a 'group of people who by their activities will influence the person concerned or are themselves influenced by the person'. On the other hand, opinion is 'your feelings or thought about somebody or something, rather than fact' (Hornby, Op cit). it is also the 'expression of an attitude on a particular topic'. When attitude becomes very strong, it transforms to be opinion. Strong opinion can lead to verbal or behavioural actions. Public opinion therefore is the general expression of an attitude on a particular topic by a group of people who share common interest in issue or the beliefs or views of a group of people.

As observed, members of the public in Nigerian society are such that are informed, vibrant, observant and highly involved in the scheme of things in the entire polity. Therefore, they can properly adjudge any social institution as performing or otherwise on the basis of many parameters especially ethical consideration. Therefore, it behoves every individual to be ethical compliant in the course of discharging their duties because, the opinions of the public is quite germane as this will go a long way in determining the level of public trust and confidence people would enjoy in the society.

Ways of Curbing Corruption

At the 53rd Annual Meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, Victor Tanji suggested a four-pronged strategy for minimising corruption (Ardhianie 1998). The first was the need for an honest and clear commitment from the leaders in government and business to combat corruption. Second, was to establish a zero tolerance policy for those found guilty of corruption. Third, was to reduce all the conditions leading to the creation of corruption, like low salaries, ineffective controls, and punishments that are not applied. Fourth, was to monitor political party funding.

Civil Service Reform

Klitgaard (1998:4) argues that Civil Service reform can be achieved by implementing five strategies which can affect the environment of corruption.

- Establishment of a National Integrity Workshop, a forum where government and civil society can meet to discuss strategies to reduce corruption.
- Establishing a code of conduct for top public officials, including a pledge not to accept bribes.
- A declaration of wealth and income, including a provision where political leaders have to place private business activities into blind trusts.
- Focused efforts to improve government programs in high priority areas such as social safety nets. This program should include experiments with the citizen oversight, evaluations by community organisations, incentives based on performance for public employees, and widespread publicity about what is supposed to happen, where, and when.
- Setting up new mechanisms of citizen oversight of government projects, including their design, evaluation, and audit.

Other strategies aim to improve various public systems including the government procurement system, the fixed assets management system, the national database, the government budgeting system, the taxation management system, the legal system, the foreign

loan management system, and the competitive environment. These strategies focus on developing accountability, transparency and the financial transaction reporting system in the

public sector. Lopa (1998) emphasises the importance of an effective system of management and monitoring of corruption to be administered by honest and disciplined officers.

Alatas (1986:49–50) suggests that the most important factor in combating corruption is the moral and intellectual stature of leaders. Several conditions are necessary to effectively mitigate corruption. The public and the bureaucracy should both have a positive attachment to the government and a spiritual commitment to facilitating the progress of the nation. An efficient administration is necessary to avoid creating sources of corruption, and an anti-corruption value system must be promoted. Ideally, inspirational leadership should emanate from a group with high moral and intellectual standards, while an educated public should be informed and critical of current events. In order to prevent corruption it is necessary to enlist the support of the public. One way of doing so is by publicising corruption cases, provided privacy issues are not involved. Non-government organisations can perform an important function here in mobilising resources to run anti-corruption campaigns

and research programs. They may be able to perform a monitoring role along the lines of Transparency International.

The strategies outlined above are not very different from the strategies that are proposed by the World Bank. The World Bank (1997:105–8) argues that any reform increasing competitiveness in the economy will generally reduce incentives for corrupt behaviour. Thus, policies that lower controls on foreign trade, remove entry barriers to private industry, and privatise state firms, will all reduce opportunities for corrupt practice. The World Bank sees independent watchdog bodies as offering an effective mechanism for strengthening the monitoring and punishment of corruption. Watchdog organisations should focus on those who receive and pay bribes. Freedom-of-information acts are an important tool for facilitating oversight of public affairs. Ultimately, such monitoring mechanisms will fail unless they are supported by a legal system that punishes offenders appropriately. In order to identify circumstances that encourage corruption, Gorta (1998) emphasises the importance of finding out why individuals engage in corrupt activities. Offenders can be asked about whether they consider their actions acceptable to identify justifications for corruption and challenge those justifications.

Efforts in Fighting Corruption

To begin to combat corruption in Nigeria, a starting point is required. The entry point suggested here is to catch some 'big fish'. Further inroads can then be made through measures to empower the People's Consultative Assembly and establish an anti-corruption commission. Klitgaard (1998) argues that a system in equilibrium, as corruption has become in Nigeria, needs a shock if it is to be ruptured. This strategy sends a powerful signal that the era of accepting corruption is over. Investigations into the ill-gotten wealth of highly placed government officials were important for symbolic reasons as much as the recovery of public money. Klitgaard also suggests that the international community has an important role. Foreign donors and lenders can contribute by setting up independent investigations of past projects in which they were involved.

Improving accountability and transparency in the public sector

To begin to change the culture of corruption in the Nigerian civil service, a necessary first step is to increase remuneration offered to workers and holders of public office in Nigeria, as it is currently under the average cost of living and a major incentive for corruption. This strategy should be a part of general reforms to improve service quality, recruitment procedures, training, performance appraisal, promotion, rewards and salaries.

Conclusion

Corruption is a major problem in Nigeria requiring reform of underlying economic and political structures. The economy needs to be made more open and political structures need to become more democratic. To initiate this process, the equilibrium of the old system needs to be ruptured. One way of achieving this would be to empower and give a free hand to anti-corruption commissions (EFCC, ICPC, SON, NAFDAC, NFI etc) to freely prosecute, in very public cases, high profile officials guilty of corruption. To begin reform of the public sector, ways must be found to increase pay levels to reduce the major incentive for corruption in the Nigerian Civil Service. Our advice is that; *Only People of high moral standard and integrity should be placed in public offices.*

References

- Adegoke, J. F. (2002) THE ROLE of business ethics in national development ; a paper presented at the annual conference on business education in Nigeria; trends, issues and challenges, Ede, Nigerian Association of Business Educators
- Alatas, S.H., 1986. *The Problem of Corruption*, Times Books International, Singapore.
- Allen, L. and Voss, D. (1997): *Ethics in Technical Communications*; Shades of Gray, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., USA.
- Ardhianie, Nila, 1998. 'Korupsi di Indonesia Disorot Tajam', *Bisnis Indonesia*, 10 October. Available from Internet: URL:http://www.bisnis.com/bisnis/owa/artikel.preview?cookie=2&inw_id=76653.
- Frankena, W.K. and Granrose J.T. (eds.), (1974): *Introductory Readings in Ethics*, New Jersey, Engle Wood Cliffs, Prentice Hall
- Gorta, A., 1998. *Minimising Corruption: some lessons from the literature*, NSW Independent Commission Against Corruption, Sydney.
- Hornby, A.S (2000), *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*, Oxford, University Press Oxford
- Joseph, B. (1973). *Ethics and Morals*, New York, Harper and Row
- Klitgaard, R., 1998a. 'Corruption: beyond shame, apathy, futility', paper presented at the book launch of *Membasmi Korupsi*, Jakarta, 17 September, 1998 *Controlling Corruption*, University of California Press, California.

- Lopa, B., 1998. 'Asal muasal korupsi', *Bisnis Indonesia*, 21 November. Available from internet:URL:http://www.bisnis.com/bisnis/owa/artikel.preview?cookie=2&inw_id=79779
- Okunna, C. S. (2003). *Ethics of Mass Communication* (Second edition), Enugu, Nigeria, New Generation.
- Omole, G. (2000). *The Place of the Nigerian Press Council, in Ethics and Regulations Formulation: a Working Agenda for Journalists and the Media*, Press Center International.
- Oso, L. (2000). *Including Ethics Standards Through Education and Retraining in Ethics & Regulation: Formulating a Working Agenda for Journalist and the Media*, International Press Centre, Lagos.
- Oso L. (2011). *Mass Media and Democracy in Nigeria: The Prospect of a Pan-Nigerian Public Sphere*, Paper Presented at Des Wilson Conference on Communication at the University of Uyo, Nigeria on the 17th and 18th, March, 2011.
- Raufu, g (2003) *Mass Media and Society; Issues and Perspectives*, Nigeria, Meek Associates, Surulere, Lagos.
- Raufu, G. (2005) *Public Relations Principles*, Nigeria, Meek Associates, Surulere, Lagos.
- Rose-Ackerman, S.,(1997). *Corruption and Development*, Paper Presented at the Annual Bank Conference on Development Economics, Washington DC.
- Salim, E., 1998. *Towards strengthening integrity*, paper presented at the Annual General Meeting of Transparency International, Kuala Lumpur, 12–16 September.
- Transparency International, 1998. *1998 Corruption Perception Index*, Press release by International. Also available from internet URL:<http://www.transperency.de/documents/press-releases/1998/1998.09.22.cpi.html>.
- World Bank, 1997. *The World Development Report: The State in a Changing World*, Oxford University Press, New York.

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:
<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

