

# FoI Act, Mass Media and the Civil Society in the Fight Against Corruption in Nigeria

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## Abstract.

This study explores the relevance of the Nigerian Freedom of Information Act (FoIA) to the fight against corruption in the country. It examines the awareness of the Act by both journalists and the civil society who need it to effectively expose corrupt practices and complement the efforts of anti-graft agencies in the fight against corruption in the country. Libertarian press theory, which advocates for total freedom of speech and of the press to operate in society, serves as the theoretical framework for the study. Descriptive survey design has been adopted, with uniform questionnaire items issued to a sample of 260 respondents comprising journalists as professionals and members of the civil society across various disciplines and professions. These have been selected using purposive sampling method within Jalingo metropolis, the capital city of Taraba State. The resulting data have been analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Findings reveal that residents of the surveyed population are aware of the existence and provisions of the FoIA. However, the Act has not been effectively utilized to fight corruption due to fear of harassment and intimidation, corruption among journalists who are after 'brown envelope' and personal interests among other reasons. The study recommends that adequate security measures should be put in place to safeguard the lives of those who expose corruption. Also, journalists are charged to put national interest first above personal interest, and desist from the act of begging for financial rewards from public office holders. This will make them to be independent, and place them in a better position to expose corruption in the country.

**Keywords:** FoI Act, Mass Media, Civil Society, Corruption and Nigeria

## 1.0 Background to the study

On 28th May, 2011, former president of Nigeria, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan signed into law, the Nigerian Freedom of Information Act (FoIA) which was enacted by the National Assembly. Journalists and the civil society heaved some sighs of relief, as they viewed the Act as the way out of the high level secrecy that had for long shrouded the activities of the various administrations that ruled the country. Freedom and information are two crucial concepts in the discourse of democracy. In the words of Inokoba (2014:1) "the right of members of the public to access information held by public institutions is a fundamental prerequisite for the enthronement of good governance and the consolidation of democratic norms and practices." Many are of this opinion; in fact, this position is not open to argument, as it states but the obvious fact.

The necessity of freedom of information in a democratic set up stems from the fact that it results in the entrenchment of transparency and accountability. In other words, it helps to properly checkmate the menace of corruption. Akor and Oko (2015) submit that information fosters transparency and accountability in governance by allowing citizens to scrutinize the actions of the government and serves as the basis for proper and informed debate of those actions. In their words:

Freedom of information is not only for public hygiene, transparency and accountability in government but also a moral and legal duty which any government owes its citizens. Transparency in governance is at the heart of political responsibility and one of the barometers of measuring it is the existence of freedom of information. (Akor and Oko 2015:39)

Corruption is one of the major problems bedevilling the Nigerian state. Despite the myriad of anti-corruption agencies in place, the deadly scourge is waxing stronger, rearing its ugly head restlessly to thwart the dividends of democracy and development oriented initiatives. The hope of winning the battle against the scourge is not so strong (Egwemi, 2012). And more worrisome is the fact that stakeholders in the fight have continued to attribute the challenge of combating it to lack of adequate information about corrupt practices.

Justifying this point is the fact that the most corrupt administrations Nigerians ever witnessed were firmly shielded by such laws as the Official Secrets Act (1961), Public Officers (Protection against False Accusation) Decree (1976 and 1984), Newspaper (Prohibition from Circulation and Validation) Decree (1976), State Security (Detention of Persons) Decree (1984) among others (Daramola, 2003). In this spirit, most of the records that could have helped in exposing corruption were tagged 'classified documents', hence the ability to probe deep into government activities was lacking, or rather frustrated by the decrees.

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In their desperate struggles to resist this unjustifiable secrecy, the mass media and the civil society had been clamouring for the Freedom of Information Act since the country's return to civil rule in 1999. Their efforts met several stumbling blocks but eventually brought home the desired result. Today, the Freedom of Information Act has been enacted, making any curious person to interrogate: how well do the civil society and the mass media utilize the Act to expose and combat corruption in the country? This, among other issues, constitutes the motivation for the study.

### 1.2 Statement of the problem

The Nigerian Freedom of Information Act (enacted for about five years now) has come at a time corruption has entrenched itself as a national culture in the country. As the fight against the scourge gains momentum (thanks to the present administration), it is believed that the Act will serve as a good reinforcement. To achieve this however, the civil society and the mass media that need the Act to effectively complement the efforts of anti-graft agencies in the fight are expected, not only to understand, but also to fully utilize the provisions of the Act in the fight against corruption. Thus, the question which this study interrogates is: how far with the fight against corruption, with the FoIA in place? This question has become mandatory, given the fact that, the Act as it is in the law books alone, does not guarantee an end to corruption, until it is duly invoked by the relevant agencies (the mass media, civil society and the courts of law among others) to expose and combat the menace. Government must also have the will power to enforce the decisions of the agencies without contradictions. Then and only then shall the Act be perceived as a panacea to the fight against corruption. In this sense, the need to assess how well journalists and the civil society in the country have understood and employed the Act in the fight against corruption is indeed, a pressing one. This is exactly what the present study seeks to achieve, appraising the situation within Jalingo metropolis, the capital city of Taraba State.

### 1.3. Research questions

The whole gamut of this research effort rests on the following questions:

1. To what extent are journalists and the civil society within Jalingo metropolis aware of the FoIA?
2. Do journalists and the civil society within Jalingo metropolis utilize the FoIA effectively to expose corruption?
3. How committed or willing are the powers that be to ensure the enforcement of the Act or protection of those who expose corruption?
4. Are there challenges and obstacles that surround the use of the FoIA in the fight against corruption?

### 2.0. FoI Act, corruption, civil society and the mass media: a conceptual explication

Nigerian Freedom of Information Act (FoIA) was signed by former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in May 2011. The aim of the Act is to provide public access to records or information. Section 1(1) of the Act reads: "Notwithstanding anything contained in any other Act, Law or regulation, the right of any person to access or request information, whether or not contained in any written form, which is in the custody or possession of any public official, agency or institution howsoever described, is established" the Act is intended to:

...make public records and information more freely available, provide for public access to public records and information, protect public records and information to the extent consistent with the public interest, and the protection of personal privacy, protect serving public officers from adverse consequences of disclosing certain kinds of official information without authorization and established procedures for the achievement of those purposes. (Freedom of Information Act 2011:1)

Through the Act, both journalists and the civil society are empowered to probe deep into issues and expose corruption, misconduct, misappropriation, embezzlement and all sorts of malpractices in the process of public administration. In the words of Akor and Oko (2015), the FoIA implies a change in the principle of the provision of government information from a 'need to know' basis to a 'right to know' basis. It implies a change from passive citizenship to active citizenship in government.

The fundamental principles and contents of the Act include the need for maximum disclosure of information, the obligation to publish information, promotion of open governance, limited scope of expectations, the process to facilitate access to information, open meetings, supremacy of the FoIA over other Laws that limit access to information, protection of whistle blowers and the bodies responsible for enforcing the Act (Inokoba 2014, Mmadu 2011, Akor and Oko 2015, FoIA 2011)

The fact that corruption is endemic in Nigeria is not debatable. Analysts over the years have continued to decry the alarming state of the scourge (Aleyomi, 2013). In the words of Egwemi (2012), corruption is one vice which requires immediate tackling. Given its damaging consequences, it is not a problem whose solution can be put off to another day. Similarly, Oyedepo (2010) avers that corruption in Nigeria has become like a whirlwind, destroying everything on its path.

Scholarly definitions of the concept abound. To Akinyemi (2004), corruption is the acquisition of that which one (as a member of society, not public official alone) is not entitled to. More elaborately, Odekunle (1986) defines corruption as the act of asking, giving of gift, favour in pervasion or the performance of an illegitimate task, callous price fixing, and smuggling, inflation of prices, election rigging and illegal arrest for harassment or intimidation purposes, conversion of other person's money or property to indirect personal use. This definition provides a broader perception of the concept, as it explicates the various acts that constitute corruption.

Corruption is a wide range of social misconduct, including fraud, extortion, embezzlement, bribery, nepotism, influence peddling, bestowing of favour to friends, abuse of public property, sale of expired and defective goods such as drugs, food etc. to the public (El-Rufai 2003)

It is noteworthy here, that as many as these issues that are termed corrupt practices are, all of them to a great extent, are hazardous to the socio-economic wellbeing of man. In fact, the effects of this act on society are multifaceted, ranging from decay of the public sector, moral decadence, civil unrest, bad governance, enthronement of mediocrity, malfunctions of public institutions and agencies among a myriad of other defects (see Egwemi, 2012).

The fight against this act has continued in the country by anti-corruption agencies, notably, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). However, the fight has been compounded by the bitter reality, that a vast number of those who are key actors in the hunt for perpetrators and culprits are deeply engrossed in the act, a fact which among other issues necessitated Egwemi (2012) to assert that the problem of corruption in Nigeria has defied solution. Caught in this quagmire, the civil society who bears the brunt of the act most is expected to be active participant in the anti-graft war.

The civil society, according to Audu and Ben (2015) is the private sphere of material, cultural and political activities, resisting the incursions of the state. The civil society is seen as counterweight to state power and is, therefore, a critical agent in ensuring transparency and accountability. In his conceptualisation, Osaghea (1977) cited in Ukase and Ben (2015) avers that three elements are important in the definition of the civil society: autonomy from the state, public character (setting a normative order of the state), and furtherance of a common good. This description provides a picture of the set of people that can be termed 'the civil society'.

Ukase and Ben (2015) add that the civil society encompasses a vast array of organisations which are both formal and informal in character. These include: economic, cultural, informational and educational, interest based, developmental, civil-seeking in non-partisan fashion to improve the political system and make it more democratic through anti-corruption effort by promoting transparency and accountability. They stress further, that the primary functions and significance of the civil society is that it provides a platform for citizens to express their interests, passions, preferences and ideas, to exchange information, to achieve collective goals, to make demands on the state and to hold state officials accountable (Ukase and Ben 2015).

The mass media provide a good platform for echoing the views/aspirations of the civil society. In the words of Sambe (2008), the mass media comprise both electronic and print forms of communication which disseminate information to a large, wide, scattered, heterogeneous and anonymous audience simultaneously. Consequently, such platforms as radio, television, newspaper and magazine, the internet, cable networks, etc. are categorized under the mass media. The interaction between the personnel (reporters, editors, producers, camera men, sound engineers, typists, etc.) and the machines/facilities of the various media platforms makes the task of information dissemination for massive consumption possible.

These two components combined (personnel and facilities) make the institution of the mass media a strong one in public discussion, as they shape the dimensions of public opinion formation, expression and usage (Sambe 2008, Asemah 2011, Adeyanju 2013). The institution of the mass media is crucial to the sustenance of democracy, owing to the fact that it is saddled with the responsibility of educating the masses, informing them of government policies and initiatives, as well as sensitizing and mobilizing them to be active participants in the democratic process.

More so, the mass media interpret and explain government policies and stress their relevance to society, a role which Harold Lasswell (1948) in Sambe (2008) refers to as the correlation function of the press. And more importantly, the institution of the mass media through its surveillance function puts an eye on government institutions in particular, and the society in general to see that they do not deviate from the acceptable standard. This is essential to the fight against the monster, corruption; which constitutes a cog in the wheel of the progress of contemporary Nigeria. These responsibilities combined, earned the mass media their revered status in contemporary times as the Fourth Estate of the Realm (Sambe 2008).

It is clear, from the foregoing discussion, that, the various concepts explored are not only vital, but also interrelated in the fight against corruption, i.e. the FoIA empowers both the mass media and the civil society to expose and effectively combat corruption in the country.

## 2.1. Review of related studies

The nexus between freedom of information and accountability in the process of governance has long been established by researchers. Akor and Oko (2015) refer to information as the ‘oxygen’ which every political system needs for transparency and accountability. They describe transparency as the main indicator of political responsibility, with freedom of information as the ‘barometer’ for measuring it. Similarly, the duo establish the link between lack of transparency and accountability in governance, and the quest for secrecy. In their words:

Where there is lack of transparency and accountability, public institutions need secrecy to survive and usually justify their secrecy in the name of national security, public order and overriding public interest. Very often, these public institutions treat information as their property and the public have no right to know. The existence of unnecessary secrecy in government has also led to bureaucratic arrogance, corruption, high handedness and definitive decision making. Secrecy of public actions and inactions and lack of access to information by the citizens about operations or activities of government impede development and aggravate corruption (Akor and Oko 2015:39)

Inokoba (2014) who notes that information is a vital and indispensable ingredient of participatory democracy asserts that democratic deepening or consolidation cannot take place if the populace are not legally empowered with information concerning the management of the state. According to him, an unhindered access of the Nigerian citizenry to public information is a vital and fundamental instrument of enthroning and consolidating government legitimacy. Information sharing and openness can entrench national stability by establishing a two-way dialogue system between the state and Nigerian citizens, helping to promote public trust in the political system.

To this end, he concludes that the FoIA is no doubt, an effective platform that can check the excesses of the Nigerian public office holders by placing all their activities as representatives of the people within the public domain. Ali (2014), while stressing the relevance of the FoIA in addressing the challenges of good governance in Nigeria, submits that FoIA aims to improve transparency in the conduct of public affairs, by making it easier than hitherto, access to public records and information that are deemed the public interest. According to him, by illuminating the activities of the government that were previously shrouded in mystery, the citizens are drawn to become more engaged with the quality of governance and the use of public resources.

Civil society organisations in the words of Aderonmu (2011) have contributed in no small degree to the anti-graft war in Nigeria by understanding issues related to judicial corruption through monitoring and exposing incidences, as well as indicators of corruption such as delays, granting of injunctions, and quality of decision. Consequently, the watch-dog role of the civil society on the activities of anti-graft agencies of the government has been sustaining anti-corruption crusades in Nigeria. Sowunmi *et al* (2010) emphasize that the mass media are good institutions in the fight against corruption, as they help to provide information about government projects and the misdemeanours that go on in the course of executing them, hence exposing the acts of fund mismanagement. Lodha (2007) suggests that corruption can be prevented, checked, and minimized if not eradicated, by making people ‘conscious’ of its pernicious impact on their life. Here, she stresses that mobilization of the people on a common political platform focussing on the issues of transparency and accountability is crucial to winning the war against corruption.

With this constitutional empowerment courtesy of the FoIA, the civil society is hereby challenged to take advantage of the opportunity to contribute to the fight against corruption. Ukase and Audu (2015) who hold this opinion argue that the civil society is a strong force in the fight against corruption, while freedom, capacity building and unity are some of the factors that facilitate their role to contribute their quota in the act of governance.

In a similar development, the mass media which hitherto, have been under undue restrictions and regulations through the myriad of repressive/draconian or obnoxious press laws/decrees that were in place have been freed courtesy of the Act. The liberty to operate and probe deep into issues of public concern has been broadened. The issue worth investigating now is this: how well have the civil society and the mass media utilized the Act to champion the fight against corruption in the country? This has been addressed in the course of the study.

## 2.2. Theoretical framework

The Libertarian Press Theory provides the theoretical bedrock for this work. According to its proponents, (John Milton, John Locke, John Stuart Mill, and Thomas Jefferson), libertarianism hinges on the ‘self-rightening’ principle. It advocates for a ‘free market place of ideas’ with the hope that good ideas will naturally ‘sell’ at the expense of the bad ones (Bitner 1989, Sambe 2008, Nwabueze 2014). To this end, all forms of restrictions or limitations to freedom of expression are criticised.

The theory which emerged in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century opposes the authoritarian press theory which

subjected the press to strict government regulations and restrictions. During the authoritarian era, the press was viewed as an agency of the state which was expected to protect its interest, hence the need to act in accordance with the dictates of the state. However, with the libertarian press theory, the press operate with unlimited freedom, devoid of all forms of censorships. This theory is relevant to discussions in this study.

Although the Nigerian constitution addresses the issue of freedom of expression in section 39, the FoIA expands the scope of press freedom in the country, as it provides for freedom of access to information of whatever kind. The implication here is that, though freedom of expression has been guaranteed by the 1999 constitution, as amended, official records and information that are vital in the fight against corruption were shrouded in bureaucratic secrecy and tagged ‘classified information’; hence the advent of the FoIA provides a new dimension to the concept of press freedom in the country.

### 3.0. Method of study

This study adopts the descriptive survey approach. To Wimmer and Dominick (2014), a descriptive survey attempts to describe or document current conditions or attitudes so as to explain what exists at the moment. In descriptive surveys, the interest is in discovering the current situation in the area under investigation. The study which is limited to Jalingo, the state capital of Taraba State (North Eastern geopolitical region), targets two sets of people: journalists working with the various media outfits in Jalingo and the civil society (or the general public). A sample of two hundred and sixty respondents has been drawn purposively (for the fact that the various individuals that make up the population are not known to the researchers, making it impossible for probability sampling techniques to be adopted) from this population and issued a uniform item of questionnaire. This availed the study the required data which has been analysed and presented below, using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

### 4.0. Data presentation/answering research questions

Data obtained from the above described procedure have been presented and discussed below in relation to the objectives set in the study.

#### 4.1. Demographic information of respondents

**Table 1: Age range of respondents**

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
<b>18-30</b>	127	52
<b>31-45</b>	83	34
<b>46-60</b>	32	13
<b>60 and above</b>	3	1
<b>Total</b>	245	100

Source: field survey, 2016

**Table 2: Educational level of respondents**

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
<b>FSLC</b>	1	0
<b>SSCE</b>	32	14
<b>ND/NCE</b>	85	36
<b>HND/Bachelor’s Degree</b>	110	47
<b>MSC/PhD</b>	4	2
<b>Others</b>	2	1
<b>Total</b>	234	100

Source: field survey, 2016

**Table 3: Occupational distribution of respondents**

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
<b>Civil Servant</b>	104	52
<b>Private Sector</b>	46	23
<b>Others</b>	49	25
<b>Total</b>	199	100

Source: field survey, 2016

The tables above present the demographic information of respondents. Consideration has been given to three key aspects of respondents’ demographic information due to their relevance to the study, namely: age, educational qualification and occupation. In table one which presents the age distribution, 52% of the

respondents fall within the age range of 18-30, 34% fall within 31-45 years, 13% fall within 46-59 years while 1% falls within the age category of 60 and above. Thus majority of the respondents in this study are youths.

Table two presents the educational attainment of respondents. Here, 14% of the respondents have completed only secondary education, 36% have acquired either National Diploma or National Certificate in Education; 47% have either Higher National Diploma or Bachelor's Degree, 2% have attained post graduate levels while 1% has other qualifications. This result portrays most of the respondents in the as educated.

In table three which presents the by occupational distribution, 52% are civil servants, 23% work with the private sector, while 25% belong to the 'others' category. People in this category are predominantly students, interns and youth corps members, who are yet to be gainfully employed with any recognizable agency or institution. For emphasis, about 13% of the respondents in this study are journalists. Hence the data represent the views of both the journalists and members of the civil society.

#### 4.1.1. Research question one: To what extend are journalists and the civil society within Jalingo metropolis aware of the FoIA?

The data in the study provide evidence that journalists and members of the civil society within the study area are aware of the existence and provisions of the FoIA as well as its relevance to the fight against corruption. Table two below presents responses in this regard.

**Table 2: respondents' awareness of the FoIA**

Are you aware of the existence and provisions of the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act?

Variable	Number	Percentage
Yes	214	87
Partially	15	6
No	16	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: field survey, 2016

**Table 5: respondents' awareness of the relevance of the Act in the fight against corruption**

Are you aware of the relevance of the Act to the fight against corruption in the country?

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
Yes	194	85
Partially	22	10
No	11	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: field survey, 2016

From table 4, 87% of the respondents are aware of the existence and provisions of the FoIA, 6% are partially aware, while 7% are not aware at all of its existence. This indicates that people within the surveyed area are much aware of the FoIA.

Table 5 presents respondents' awareness of the relevance of the Act to the fight against corruption. Here, 85% of the respondents are aware of its relevance to the anti-graft war, 10% are partially aware, while 5% are not aware of its relevance to the anti-graft war at all. This indicates that respondents within the surveyed area are equally aware of the importance of the Act to the fight against corruption. Probing further, majority of the respondents agree that the FoIA provides a good cover to those who are willing to expose corrupt practices.

#### 4.1.2. Research question two: do journalists and the civil society within Jalingo metropolis utilize the FoIA effectively to expose corruption?

Result in this study indicates that journalists and members of the civil society utilize the FoIA to expose corruption in the country. Below are responses on this.

**Table 6: journalists' utilization of the FoIA to expose corruption**

Journalists in Nigeria have adequately utilized the FoI Act to expose corruption

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
Strongly agree	45	18
Agree	67	28
Undecided	50	21
Disagree	52	22
Strongly disagree	27	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: field survey, 2016

**Table 7: utilization of the FoIA by the civil society to expose corruption**  
 The civil society in Nigeria has effectively utilized the FoIA in the fight against corruption

Variable	Number	Percentage
<b>Strongly agree</b>	70	27
<b>Agree</b>	78	31
<b>Undecided</b>	38	15
<b>Disagree</b>	45	18
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	24	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** field survey, 2016

Responses in tables 6 and 7 above present mixed reactions. While a good number of respondents agree that the FoIA is effectively utilized to expose corruption, a reasonable number again disagree with the assertion. For instance, in table 6, 18% and 28% of the respondents respectively, summing up to 46% are of the view that journalists in the country utilize the Act to expose corruption. 21% are neutral, while 22% and 11%, summing up to 33% disagree with the position.

In table 7, 27% and 31% respectively are of the view that the civil society in the country has utilized the Act to expose corruption. 15% are neutral on this, while 18% and 9% respectively disagree that the Act is effectively utilized in this regard. This suggests thus, that the Act has been utilized by both journalists and the civil society to expose corruption, at least, based on the views of the respondents.

Probing further, respondents mentioned press coverage of the National Assembly cars scandal, Femi Odotole's cars scandal, Bokola Saraki's controversial declaration of assets, former National Security Adviser to the President, col. Sambo Dasuki arms deal, President Muhammadu Buhari's chief of staff and MTN scandal, misappropriation of funds meant for providing succour to IDPs, Governor Kashim Shetima's Local Government funds embezzlement and Patience Jonathan's multiple accounts scandal as some of the cases where the FoIA has been deployed to fight corruption. It is noteworthy here, that majority of the respondents could not mention a case where the FoIA has been deployed to fight or expose corruption in the country, and hence, only a handful of respondents attribute the above mentioned cases as instances where the FoIA has been utilized to fight corruption.

**4.1.3. Research question three: how committed or willing are the powers that be to ensure the enforcement of the Act or protection of those who expose corruption?**

Respondents here lament that the authorities are not committed to ensure the implementation of the FoIA. Responses on this are presented in the table below.

**Table 8: government's commitment to the full implementation of the FoIA**

The powers that be are committed to ensure the enforcement of the Act for the protection of those who expose corruption

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
<b>Strongly agree</b>	25	10
<b>Agree</b>	40	16
<b>Undecided</b>	49	20
<b>Disagree</b>	71	29
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	60	25
<b>Total</b>	<b>245</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** field survey, 2016

From the table above, only 10% and 16%, i.e. 26% of the respondents are in support of the government as far as the zeal to implement the FoIA is concerned. While 20% are undecided, 29% and 25% disagree and strongly disagree respectively that government is not committed to the full implementation of the FoIA. To this end and as far as respondents in this study are concerned, government is not committed to ensure the full implementation of the FoIA.

**4.1.4. Research question four: are there challenges and obstacles that surround the use of the FoIA in the fight against corruption?**

Several factors have been advanced by respondents as stumbling blocks to the use of the FoIA to fight corruption. Prominent among these are fear of harassment and victimization as well as threat to individual life. Respondents aver that individuals are afraid to blow whistle or raise alarm in the face of wide scale corruption for the simple fact that the perpetrators would harass them if they expose them. Also, job security or the fear of losing one's job has been advanced as a stumbling block to the use of the FoIA effectively. Journalist and civil servants are said to be afraid to lose their job should they expose those perpetrating the various corrupt acts. Fear is one of the most occurring obstacles to the proper exploitation of the FoIA.

Another reason advanced by respondents as being responsible for the effective exploitation of the FoIA is

personal interest/affiliation, greed, or desire for favour and economic gratifications. Here, respondents accuse journalists as being corrupt themselves, hence, their hands are tight, a factor that has forced them to maintain silence in the face of corruption. A respondent noted: “because they also have skeletons in their cardboard”. Again, respondents accuse journalists and members of the civil society of not being aware of their rights, while others suggest that journalists and the masses are silent in the face of the pervading corruption due to the “band wagon effect”. The spiral of silence becomes the obvious case here.

Journalists are also accused of turning themselves into appendages of politicians, hence their inability to expose them. To some respondents, governments disrespect to the rule of law is the reason why some journalists are quite in the face of wide-scale corruption. Other factors suggested by respondents include the painstaking nature of excavating facts to expose corruption, lack of motivation/favourable social and legal environment, partisan journalism i.e. journalism based on primordial sentiments, laziness on the part of journalist and decadence in the civil service.

#### **4.2. Discussion of findings/conclusion**

Freedom of Information Act has been enacted in Nigeria at a time it is most needed. Corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of the nation’s public and of course, even private institutions. The endemic nature of this unfortunate act in Nigeria has raised it to the status of a national problem, as many continue to point at it as the root cause of most of the predicaments bedeviling the Nigerian state. In the fight against this monstrous act, there is every need for freedom of information to prevail. This is a prerequisite. The anti-graft war can only succeed in an environment where those who blow whistle are covered by the laws of the land, and public records are within the reach of members of the general public.

Freedom of Information Act is a step in the right direction in this regard. Its provisions have provided a good backup and reinforcement to the struggle to entrench the principles of accountability and transparency. This study discovers that the Act records relative popularity among members of the general public, however, how well it is being utilized to facilitate the anti-graft war is the next course for concern, as the study discovers it has not been effectively utilized due to several intervening variables.

Conclusively, the Freedom of Information Act has been enacted in Nigeria at the time it is most needed. With both national and international agencies pointing continuously at corruption as the major obstacle to socio-economic development, there is a dire need to tame the monster now. This is where the Act becomes important, as it is one of the greatest assets in the hands of whistle blowers who have the zeal to expose corrupt acts. It now behoves on journalist and members of the civil society to key into the opportunities and avenues provided by the Act to root out corruption in the country. Until this is done, the Freedom of Information Act remains an Act in the statutes book with little or no impact to the Nigerian society.

#### **5.0. Recommendations**

In line with the findings in the study, it becomes necessary to proffer the following recommendations:

1. The government must be ready to support the full implementation of the provisions of the FoIA. Government’s commitment in this regard will give journalists and members of the civil society the required courage to key into the provisions of the Act to expose corruption. On this note, measures must be put in place to ensure the security of those who expose corrupt acts.
2. Journalists must put national interest ahead of their personal interests, affiliations and inclinations. Regardless of who is involved, they should be ready to raise alarm wherever corrupt acts are detected for the benefits of the masses.
3. In this light, it becomes necessary to desist from ‘brown envelop journalism’ that usually turn them into appendages, stooges or praise singers of public office holders. Economic independence will give them the courage to effectively expose corruption. Media proprietors must see to the welfare of journalists on assignments. This will reduce their dependence on news sources.
4. The National Orientation Agency and other relevant agencies should constantly sensitize the masses on some of the Acts they need to give them the impetus to behave like patriotic citizens in the society. Information is power; hence, an informed society is definitely, an empowered society.
5. Above all, there is every need to replicate this study. Given the various limitations that confront the study, there is need to see how consistent the findings will be in further similar studies. The sample size is too small to generalize the findings, and the inability to identify with individual members that constitute the research population necessitates the use of purposive sampling. The use of questionnaire also limits the study; hence, there is the need to employ other research instruments to investigate the issue. The study should also be extended to other areas to see the overall level of awareness of the Freedom of Information Act among the masses in the country. This recommendation is specifically for further studies.



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