Article   **Open Access**

CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Nsikan Nelson Ekong
Department of Philosophy, University of Uyo, Nigeria
Email: pstnsinelkong@gmail.com

Abstract

Corruption is the basis of the problem in many societies ranging from social, religious, moral, economic, Political, cultural, academic and so on. It is a global problem and no country is completely free from its menacing grip. In recent times, the level of uncontrolled cases of corrupt practices in Nigerian is so alarming such that if it is left unchecked Nigeria may continue to experience state capture. The unimaginably challenging situation in most African countries ranging from hunger to a high level of poverty among the citizenry, religious crises, insurgency, economic and political unrest have all been attributed to the high rate of corruption, which has entrenched itself in the national ethos, politics, civil society, public and private sectors of business and commerce. The paper identify some key factors that causes corruption to thrive in Nigeria. The work centered on the fact that the high level of corruption in Nigeria is due to poor leadership and bad governance which in turn make corruption endemic and alarming such that it raised so much concern in recent times. The paper concluded that strengthening institution and promoting good governance can minimize corruption.

Keywords: Corruption, Governance, Leadership, Politics, Institution.

Introduction

Corruption is a significant challenge in Nigeria, affecting various aspects of the country's economy, politics, and society. Yusuf Usman (2014) observed that Gire posited that corruption is like virus which attack main structures that makes for the progress of societies (Gire, 1999). This is particularly true for a developing country like Nigeria where oftentimes valuable funds and resources allocated for sectors like health care, education, job creation and other social developments are either rightly embezzled, misappropriated, or somehow depleted through kickbacks and over-invoicing by agents of government. The magnitude of corrupt prfactices over the years in Nigeria are clearly shown in different periodic rankings of Transparency International (TI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), Nigeria has consistently ranked among the most corrupt countries in the world. In the context of Africa for instance, corruption has been so institutionalized that some people consider it as an "African factor" and "African way of doing things". Corrupt practices can take many forms, such as looting the national treasury, bribery, dishonesty, neglect of duty, exploitation, injustice, and lack of fairness among others. This has raised so much concern in many societies in recent times and it is a significant drag in the nation's economic growth and development. The prevalence of corruption brings about decay in ethical values and orientation. These negative impact corruption has posed on economic growth, ethical value, moral and cultural values in Nigerian society today has earned Nigeria a very poor image within and outside her domain. Generally, corruption denotes efforts made to secure wealth or power through illegal means or a misuse of public power for private benefit, usually at the public's expense. Acts of corruption could also involve giving or taking a bribe or the exercise of indiscretion, advance-fee fraud, fraud, money laundering and embezzlements. There are other forms of corrupt practices and economic crimes which include, narcotic, drug trafficking, bribery, looting, child labour, illegal oil bunkering and illegal mining, tax evasion, foreign exchange malpractice including counterfeiting currency, theft of intellectual property and piracy, open market abuse and dumping of toxic and prohibited goods.

What is Corruption?

The term corruption is derived from the Latin word "corrumpo" which means "to decompose", and "to disintegrate or to lose value, to become putrid and useless". Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines corruption as "an act of dishonesty or an illegal behaviour aimed at using public office for one's private gain. Corruption means impairment of integrity, virtue or unlawful means (as bribery); a departure from the original, what is pure or correct". According to Ochulor and Bassey (2000):

> Corruption is the misuse of power for private benefit or advantage. This power may, or may not reside in the public domain. Besides money, the benefit can take the form of promotion, special treatment, commendation, or the favours of women or men…. In ordinary parlance, corruption simply means asking, giving or taking a fee, gift or favours as a condition for performance of one's legal assigned responsibility (pp. 466-476).

Most people are familiar with the term "corruption" and have a general idea of what it means. People often associate the term with greed, dishonesty, secrecy and crime, all of which are examples of unethical behaviour. They also rightly associate the term with concrete acts, such as bribery by business men and grand theft of public funds by politicians. Few people however, advance beyond that point in their understanding of corruption. While examples of corruption from scandals and journalistic exposes are commonly referenced, a broad understanding of the term proves elusive. Experts disagree over the adequacy of the common definition, "use of public power for private gain". There is a strong consensus among researchers, journalists, political leaders, and citizens in general that corruption is a significant problem, but the reasons people give for this proposition vary widely. As with defining corruption and explaining its significance, measuring corruption within and across nations is also fraught with difficulty. There are various available measurements of corruption resulting in a number of country ranking indices, each with their own challenges.

Despite many definitions and contextual uses of corruption, most dictionaries and legal systems agree about its basic meaning. The Oxford and Merriam-Webster dictionaries begin,

respectively, with "dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power" and "dishonest or illegal behaviour especially by powerful people". Moving in unison, they then proceed to deeper notions. First comes a transformation from purity to debasement for example, "a departure from the original or from what is pure or correct". Second, and relatedly, comes the archaic meaning of "decay", "putrefaction" and decomposition". The Latin words "corruptio" and corrumpere" are even clearer on what this transformation process of decay signals, as they are often associated with the words "destroy" or "destruction" in English. Hence, corruption refers to the sort of decay that leads to destruction. This meaning was clear enough in major historical episodes related to corruption, such as the protestant reformation's claims about the Catholic Church, particularly its sale of indulgences (that is, to reduce punishment for sin), and historians explanations for the decline of the Roman Empire. Ramsay MacMullen (1990) posits,

> Bribery and abuses always occurred, of course. But by the fourth and fifth centuries they had become the norm: no longer abuses of a system, but an alternative system in itself. The cash nexus overrode all other ties. Everything was bought and sold: public office…access to authority on every level, and particularly the emperor. The traditional web of obligations became a marketplace of power, ruled only by naked self-interest. Government's operation was permanently, massively distorted (pp. 90-111).

Corruption, therefore, ranges in its manifestations from bribery and fraud to socio-political transformations of the greatest magnitude. Corruption, however, at times, may be better conceived as a suboptimal way of getting things done when ethically superior ways are perceived as being unavailable, flawed, or too costly. Short of collapse, corruption can lead to a tenacious pattern of unethical behaviour that is sustained and replicated over many years. This multiplicity of understandings suggests that corruption is a polyvalent concept. Naturally, it covers a variety of actions by a variety of actors in a variety of contexts. More importantly, from a definitional standpoint, different observers will characterize the same instance of corruption in different ways according to a variety of factors, including their values, assumptions, goals, cultures and skills sets. Accepting that there are different understandings of corruption and rising to this challenge can help us cultivate an integrated and multidisciplinary understandings of corruption.

The term "corruption" was initially linked to business elites taking advantage of the state resources for private gain. Powerful interests from the private sector can influence (or bribe) officials and parliaments to write registration for example giving companies legal access to the exploitation of natural resources. State capture can occur regardless of a country's regime-type, but is more likely to happen in trasnitioned economies where states are in the process of (re-) building instructions. Nevertheless, state capture can also occur in well-developed and mature democracies, especially in cases involving lobbyists that work on behalf of companies or industry associations. When such lobbyists, explains Graycar (2015), "seek to have legislation written to favour their activities or to disadvantage competitors, questions are raised about whether this is part of the democratic decisions and regulations is (sic) bought" (Graycar, 2015, p. 89).

Causes of Corruption

A monolithic causation of corruption has been floated, adopting the revisionist-cum-functionalist approach that tends to ignore the administrative consequences of corruption instead of the more analytical political economy approach. The consensus is now to discountenance a mono-causal reason of corruption. Instead, the phenomenon has been

recognized as being complex. This complexity is further compounded by the simple fact that corruption is self-perpetuating, begetting more corruption as the circle widens. Caiden (1981) aptly puts it thus, that "once it enters the blood of a public organization, it spreads quickly to all parts such that finally, the whole fabric and sensibilities of the society become affected and thus bastardized". Caiden and Naomi (1977) expressed this eventuality thus; it is a situation where wrongdoing has become the norm and the standard accepted behaviour necessary to accomplish organizational goals according to notions of public responsibility and trust has become the exception, not the rule. In this situation, corruption has become so regularized an institutionalized that organization supports wrongdoing and actually penalized those who live up to the old norms.

The suggested solution has suffered from the revisionist-cum-functional methodology used for its analysis. Thus, the contention has been that good leadership is a panacea for corruption (Olowu, 1982). Citing the cases of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and General Murtala Muhammed of Nigeria, Carino (1985) and Aina (1982) respectively have also expressed similar sentiments. Although instances abound of crusading and morally upright leadership. The prevailing reality has shown this belief to be too naïve and simplistic as either such leaders eventually fall prey to the pervasive corrupt system in the society, or, as in the case of General Murtala Muhammed are deposed or killed. The argument here as this study observed is that, while good, honest and dedicated leadership may go a long way to curbing corruption, it is not a sufficient condition. More fundamental is the implication of a complex casual factor which can lead to the eradication of the phenomenon. It follows that if corruption is a complex issue, attempts to eradicate it must also be complex. As Braibanti (1979) puts it, "unilinear notions of causation and cure of governmental corruption is mythical". According to Caiden (1979), "reforms of corruption is not a costless undertaking" as "the higher the goals of reform, the higher the costs". This consideration seems to have prompted Sherman (1978) to opine that reform efforts should not be dissipated in an attempt to totally eradicate corruption, but should be directed to defeating and preventing organizational corruption and the minimization of individual corruption.

In relation to the constant and variable factors, Singh observed that Prenzler (2009, p. 80) identified central cause of police corruption as weak accountability. However, an example of successful curbing or elimination of petty corruption is evident in World Bank report. According to Singh, in Georgia, during Mikheil Saakashvili's administration (2003 to 2007) reform which increased the police salary by 15 times and also introduced a merit-based recruitment system, found that experienced staff and loyal officials were retained to run divisions, and young energetic staff were appointed that increased the average wages of public officials, for instance, in construction licensing 'by a factor of 20' to further undermine incentives of soliciting or accepting bribes. The work by Hubert Williams (2021) titled "Core Factors of Police Corruption Across the World", argued that there are four major deficiencies areas were police corruption arises from; (a) recruitment, training and promotion; (b) resources, such as pay and equipment (c) system of accountability within departments; courts and the law; and (d) cultural traditions that inhabit the development of professional police standards. This study indicate that, acts of corruption that involve the police, weakens the faith of a common man, because the police to some ordinary citizens is the only arm of government visible, and a yardstick by which they measure authority.

In their paper, Analysis of Corruption from the Ethical and Moral Perspectives" Ochulor and Bassey (2000), posits that some of the major causes of corruption are rooted in our borrowed contemporary materialistic, capitalistic and individualistic philosophical outlook, as

well as in the resultant socio-cultural, political and economic situations we have created for ourselves in Nigeria, Ochulor and Bassey see corruption as the consequences of the many years of hardship and the high level of poverty that have become the way of life in the country for them, and some of the effects of corruption in Nigeria include: poverty, reduction in economic growth and efficiency, underdevelopment and a general collapse of the social structures that make for a healthy society. This study noted that corruption is a global problem and there is no country of the world that is totally free of its menacing grip. Uduigwomen (2001) maintains that the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria shows "a leadership praxis that promotes the selfish interests of a selected few at the expense of the common good." The problem of corruption in Nigeria is at the basis of the problem of Nigeria. Uzoigwe, Chukwuma-Offor and Amara Mary (2021) in their work entitled "Ethical Position and the Problem of Corruption in Nigeria" posits that corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of the nation negatively affecting the development of the country in almost all spheres of human endeavour.

Consequences of Corruption

Saul Mallard (2021), corroborates the United Nations on the issue of corruption by arguing that corruption is a complex, social, political and economic phenomenon that affects all democratic institutions. It slows economic development and contributes to government instability. According to the United Nations, corruption attacks the foundation of democratic institutions by distorting electoral processes and perverting the rule of law. The negative influence cannot be overemphasized; it is clear that today's bureaucratic system is full of quagmires whose only reason for existing is the requesting of bribes. Osamede (2018) in his work entitled "The Crisis of Values as the Foundation of Nigeria's Human Security Challenge", observes that corruption and bad leadership has grossly affected human security in Nigeria. He maintains that corruption is neither faceless nor is it perpetuated by the ignorant and the poor or less privileged in the society, instead, corruption is rampant in everyone and everywhere. Where there is corruption in the land, there is bound to be insecurity. Osamede observed that Omoregbe posited that "an immoral society is also a sick society". This study, argues that, a corrupt society is one where there is dishonesty, fraud, embezzlement of public funds and all sorts of vices and unethical behaviours.

The work of Marie Chene (2014), entitled; "The Impact of Corruption on Growth and Inequality", argued that while there is a broad consensus that corruption has a negative impact on economic growth and development, some researchers continue to argue that corruption may be economically justified as it provides opportunities to bypass inefficient regulations and red tape, and allow the private sector to correct government failures and inefficiency. As such, it could potentially promote economic growth by removing bureaucratic barriers to entry and lowering company transaction costs when trying to comply with excessive regulations. Some studies have also argued that the detrimental impact of corruption on growth may be context specific and associated with factors such as the country's legal and institutional framework, quality of governance, political regime, etc. However, this study suggest that while corruption is consistently detrimental in countries where institutions are effective, it can potentially increase productivity and entrepreneurship in highly regulated countries that do not have effective government institutions and governance systems.

Also, World Bank staff working papers provides data on effect of corruption on political development. According to Gould (1983), "the corruption prevalent in developing countries is said to create a breeding ground for violence" (p.143). This claim has been borne out by the fact in several nations. In Ghana for example, corruption has been blamed for intensifying inter-

ethnic conflict during the Nkrumah regime (Werlins 1973). Also, corruption brought violence and social disorganization to Uganda (Gould, 1983, p. 73). This study observed that, many of the military takeovers in parts of Africa (like Nigeria), Asia, and Latin America have been justified by the need to stamp out corruption. However, just as regime changes do not guarantee that corruption will be reduced or eliminated, not all corruption leads to regime change. Although widespread corruption in Nigeria, for example, has eroded the public trust in the Nigerian government, including its leaders and functionaries. As for the effect of corruption on the political development, it has been noted that corruption:

i.   Encourages and perpetuates closed politics, preventing the development of violence.

ii.   Suppresses political opposition, generating increased resentment and violence.

iii. Perpetuates and widens social class and economic divisions, leading to societal strain and preventing cohesion.

iv.   Prevents policy changes and diverts public resources contributing to conditions of private affluence and public squalor (Caiden and Caiden).

Corruption, rather than contributing to political development, appears to generate conditions of violence, social unrest, political instability and regime change through military take overs. Gould, in his work with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development **/** the World Bank, demonstrates the effects of Corruption on Economic Development and Administrative performances. As Gould (1983) observes, much corruption in the developing countries take place in the import-export sector of their economies. It commonly assumes the form of illegal purchases of the import licenses, under- invoicing and over- invoicing of imports and exports and smuggling. Gould illustrates that in one empirical study that sought to determine how the over- invoicing of imports affected the allocation of investment and the structure of industry in Pakistan, estimates for 1966 and 1970 placed the magnitude of over- invoicing at 20% and 40% of the actual invoice price, respectively. The study concluded that the profit incentives of over-invoicing capital goods influence investment decisions in such a way that they:

i.   discourage the growth of the capital-goods industry, since it must compete with an effectively   subsidized imports.

ii.   create industries that are unnecessarily foreign-capital intensive and perpetuate a pattern of development that is heavily dependent on foreign capital.

iii. reduce the level and growth of consumption and employment by discouraging the use of existing plants and equipment in favor of adding new capital.

iv.   discourage industrial employment through both reduced capital utilization and adoption of labour-saving, capital-intensive techniques.

v.   spread corruption and raise the costs to doing business through the distribution of over-invoicing profits from industrialists to government officials. But under- invoicing and over invoicing also contribute to capital flight from developing countries.

Consequently, Ifedigbo (no date), also demonstrated the effects of corruption in Nigerian economic development, by observing that in the last administration of president Muhammadu Buhari, Price Water HOUSE Coopers (PWC) presented a report entitled "Impact of Corruption on Nigeria's Economy to the Vice President Yemi Osinbajo at the Presidential Villa, Abuja, showing the PWC team report centered on Nigeria's economy overtime. According to the PWC study, corruption in Nigeria could cost up to 37% of Gross Domestic Products (GDP) by 2030 if it is not dealt with immediately. This cost was equated to be about $1,000 per person between 2014 and 2030.

In his work entitled "Corruption Around the World: Causes, Consequences, Scope and Cures" Vito (1998) argued that corruption has been around for thousands of years, but in recent years it has been very alarming. The alarming state of corruption in recent times is a reflection of the increasing scope of the problem of corruption. It should be clear that it is impossible to measure corruption, but it is possible to measure the perception rate of corruption. Kanu (2018), observed that Transparency International Corruption Perception Index for 2015 showed that Denmark and New Zealand scored 91 percent and ranked the highest countries free of corruption, while North Korea and Somalia with 8 percent were ranked the highest countries on the corruption scale. Also, on February, 2025, the Transparency International (TI), officially launched the 2024 corruption perception index (CP) showing that Nigeria scored 26 out of 100 (. However, action can still be taken to minimize corruption, although there have been several attempts in the past that did not achieved good success in the fight against this ravaging phenomenon corruption. There are several consequences of corruption in Nigeria ranging from increase of poverty, inequality, economic instability and reduced economic growth, undermining of trust in institutions and government, inefficiency and location of resources, distortion of market and competition, and human right abuses. These slowdown development and economic growth, and placed the nation as one of the third countries in the world. Corruption also weaken the rule of law in recent times such that the law is no more seen as the last hope of man. Corruption brings about environmental degradation, social unrest and instability, and reduction of foreign investment. There are specific consequences of corruption in various sectors in Nigeria such as:

i.   Health care: Corruption can lead to inadequate services, poor quality medicine, and limited access to health care.

ii. Education: Corruption can result in unequal access to education and limit opportunity for an indigent students.

iii. Infrastructure: Poor constructed infrastructure is as a result of corruption most of the times. Corruption increase cost and reduce quality services.

Conclusion

The problem of corruption can be minimize if a sense of duty, goodwill, justice and fairness is embraced and demonstrated by most individuals in a society. It takes societal co-operation to control and reduce corruption or even eliminate it. It is rather unfortunate that today's society rather celebrates what should be abhorred and despises honesty, integrity, equity and truth which is crucial in achieving a good and successful society. We cannot shrink and shy away from modelling ethical and moral behaviours just because the society rarely rewards honesty, truth and other virtue. In addition, this paper suggest that, to minimize corruption in Nigeria, the following must be taken as a priority:

i.   There is need to strengthen institutions and promote good governance.

ii. Accountability and transparency must be promoted in all sectors and commerce.

iii. Nigerian citizen must encourage whistle blowing and report every act of corruption.

iv. There must be an effective implementation of Anti-corruption policies and the rule of law.

v.   Cultural and societal change must be promoted to reject corrupt practices.

Works Cited

Aina, S. "Bureanucratic Corruption in Nigeria: The Continuing Search for Causes and Cures". *International Review Administrative Science*, 1982.

Braibanti, R. Reflection on Bureaucratic Corruption in M.U, Ekpo (ed). *Bureaucratic Corruption in Sub-Sahara Africa*. Washington University Press, 1983.

Caiden, G. and Noami. "Public Maladministration and Bureaucratic Corruption". https://doi/10.1080/02529165.1981.1080097, 1977.

Caiden, N. "Public Budgeting Amidst Uncertainty and Inability". https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5850.00501. pp. 6-19, 1981.

Caiden, N. Short Changing the Public Review, https://www.jstor.org.stable/i239988, 1979.

Carino, L. V. "The Politicization of the Philippine Bureaucracy", Corruption or Commitment? International Review Administrative Science, 1985.

Chene, M. Transparency International. Tihelpdesk@transparency.org,2014.

Gire, J. I. Psychological Analysis of Corruption in Nigeria, Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, 1999.

Gould, D.J. "Effects of Corruption on Administrative Performance". The International Bank for Reconstruction, and Development / the World Bank, Washington, 1983.

Graycar, A. "Corruption: Classification and Analysis", Policy and Society. Pp. 87-96, 2015.

Ifedigbo, S. Impact of Corruption on Nigeria's Economic Development. *International Journal of Engineering Applied Sciences and Technology,* 5(3):39-44. 2020.

Kanu, I.A. D.S.A. Igwebpuke Philosophy and the Issues of National Development: In Udo Etuk (ed), 2018.

Mallard, S. (ed). Understanding Corruption and How to Cope it; A Synthesis of Latest Thinking. https://www.islockphoto.com.photo/anticorruption, 2001.

MacMullen, R. C. "Definition of Corruption". http://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/corruption; www.merriam.webster.com/dictionary/corruption. P. 436, 1990.

Ochulor, C.L. and Bassey, E.P, "Analysis of Corruption from the Ethical and Moral Perceptive. European Journal of Scientific Research (44):466-476, 2000.

Olowu, D. "Some Causes of Bureaucratic Corruption in Nigeria: Implications for the Search for a Panacea". NASMET, Kaduna, 1983

Osamadu, C.O. The Crises of Values as the Foundation of Nigeria's Human Security Challenge. Sapientia Journal of Philosophy, 2018.

Prenzler, T. Police Corruption Preventing Misconduct and Maintaining Intergrity, New York, Routledge, 2009.

Sherman, L. "Scandal and Reform: Controlling Police Corruption". University of California Press, 1997.

Uduigwomen, A.F. Companion of Christian Philosophy and Apologetics. Ultimate Index Book Publishers, 2001.

Uzoiwe, E.F, etal. "Ethical Position and the Problem of Corruption in Nigeria". An Interdisciplinary Journal of Human Theory and Praxis 4(2), 2021.

Vito, T. Corruption Around, the World: Causes, Consequences, Scope, and Cures. International Monetary Fund, 1998.

Werlins, H.H. "The Consequences of Corruption, and Maladministration in the third World. Public Administrative Review, 1973.

Williams, H. Core Factors of Police Corruption Across the World. www.unode.ore.publications.co.2001.

Yusuf, U. Causes and Effect of Corruption. International Journal of Economics, Commerce and Management, 2014.