

## Political Corruption and Quest for Development in Nigeria

By

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the levels of corruption in Nigeria and the impact of the endemic and deep-seated corrupt practices on the quest for development in Nigeria. The paper x-rayed the genesis and sustenance of corruption and how it has permeated all facet of human endeavor in Nigeria. It adopted the content analysis of secondary data which were reviewed comprehensively and the major themes of each publication and data were isolated and discussed. The results of the analysis established that corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society and therefore a major impediment to the quest for development of Nigeria. The paper proffer some feasible panacea for the remediation of the corrosive impact of corruption in Nigeria

**Keywords:** Political corruption; Nigerian society; Quest for development, Nepotism

### Introduction

Nigeria is generally viewed as the behemoth of Africa by most Africans and non-Africans perhaps because of its extraordinary achievements in the continent in the previous three decades when she championed and spear headed the liberation of South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and other Eastern and Southern African Nations from the grips of colonial masters and exploitation. Today Nigeria is a pariah nation, looked upon by the rest of the world as a crippled giant, a veritable modern wasteland, a nation where corruption is extolled and exalted as a national culture, tradition; as a nation of business scams and fraudulent investment and contractual opportunities; a nation where corruption permeates every facet of human Endeavour and societal processes (Ojukwu and Shopeju 2010).

Nigeria is seen and given the identity as a nation that is replete with a limited sense of nationhood (Ihonvbere, 1999). It is a country that faces severe crisis in its economic, social and political development arising from endemic and deep-seated corruption. The manifestations of the crisis are clear, but the remedies much less so (Ogundiya, 2009). Transparency international (2003) has constantly ranked Nigeria as either the most corrupt or 2<sup>nd</sup> most corrupt nation in the

world. This spell doom for Nigeria in terms of investment and capital inflow and business dealings within and outside the country

There are many troubling unresolved problems pertaining to political corruption in Nigeria, the damage the political corruption has done to the polity are astronomical. Corruption seems to have become a chosen lifestyle in modern Nigeria. It has continued to preserve its grasp on the country. Multifaceted names have been used to tag it. Thus, phrases such as “up front”, “kick back”, “public relations,” “settlement,” “sorting,” and “blocking,” among others, are used or coined euphemisms to justify bribery and political corruption in offices ranging from clerk or messenger to Director General, and up to all political positions, including state government and the presidency. Corruption is a daily routine and the “legalized normal” practice in the Nigerian polity (Ateihe and Timikoru, 2014). Political corruption causes file delays or disappearances, extortion by police and security employees at toll booths, delayed traffic on highways, port congestion, long lines at airports and gas stations, ghost workers’ syndrome, and election irregularities, admission and result racketeering in higher institutions amongst others. Thus, it is believed by many in and outside the Nigerian society that political corruption is the bane of Nigeria’s quest for development (Ateihe and Timikoru, 2014, Dike, 2008).

It is against this background that this paper examines the nature, structure, dimension and impact of political corruption in Nigeria and specifically elucidates the nexus between political corruption and development in the country. It further addresses the political economy of corruption and its effects on development alongside the policy implications of the menace for the Nigerian society.

### **Corruption and Development: A Conceptual Discourse.**

Corruption is a concept that has been interpreted differently by different scholars. Its conception has drawn a variety of competing and opposing viewpoints and approaches in recent years, and it is thus regarded as a global phenomenon that has long been associated with human society. It has been identified as the source of the majority of political and economic crises in the world (Lawal and Tobi, 2001). Corruption is seen as barrier to world economic development due to its many vices. A country that tolerates corruption is prone to a variety of economic, political, and social problems.

Bribery, nepotism, or moral degradation and insolvency can all be used to corrupt a person's integrity or state of affairs. It occurs when at least two people collaborate to alter society's structure or procedures, or functionaries' behavior, in order to create a dishonest, unfaithful, or polluted condition. In other words, corruption is a systemic vice that manifests itself as favoritism, nepotism, tribalism, sectionalism, undue enrichment, money accumulation, abuse of office, power, or position, and deprivation of others for undue profits and benefits. Corruption also includes bribery, smuggling, fraud, illegal payment, money laundering, inflation of contracts costs, drug trafficking, gun running, falsification of documents and records, window dressing, false declaration of age, tax evasion, underpayment, deceit, forgery, concealment, aiding and abetting to the detriment of an individual, country, society or nation (Khan, 1996, Onigu, 2000; Franlio, 2000)

Corruption can also be defined as an obsessive desire for unauthorized, unethical, and frequently criminal acquisition of wealth or benefits by individuals whose primary motivation is ego bragging and self-aggrandizement, with detrimental effects for the rest of society. Put differently, corruption is a general concept describing any organized, interdependent system in which part of the system is either not performing duties it was originally intended to, or performing them in an improper way to the detriment of the system's original purpose (Aiyegbayo, 2000, Otite 1986)

According to Ojukwu and Shopeju (2010), there are myriad forms of corruption and these include but not limited to: political corruption, bureaucratic corruption (misappropriation of public funds), money laundering (such as looted funds and wealth kept safely abroad), gratification (which involves monetary, pecuniary, material or physical favor as a condition or reward for performing official duty), and nepotism which confers undeserved favor and advantages without receiving or giving gratifications except that of primordial identity. Political corruption is the worst of them all in Nigerian society. This is because it induces other forms of corruption (Onimode, 2001).

In the context of this study, political corruption refers to government officials abusing their positions of authority for illegitimate, typically covert and private gain and this has a profound negative implication for the quest for development. In other words, corruption refer to the scenario whereby public officials use their privileged positions to appropriate the common wealth of Nigeria placed in their care by using such wealth in ways that are inimical to the development of the country. All forms of government in Nigeria and elsewhere are susceptible to political corruption – bribery, extortion, cronyism, nepotism, patronage, graft and embezzlement (Cyekye, 2003). However, as previously stated, the systemic investigation of corruption is complicated by the lack of a sufficient and widely agreed definition. Johnston (1991) in Ogundiya (2009), in his encapsulation of corruption posited that:

*“Definitions are controversial, and solid evidence is often elusive. Description account may be concluded by self-serving equivocations. Equally subtitle is the question of the significance of corrupt acts not only its consequence, but also its meaning as perceived by citizens and officials alike.*

Peter (1978), identified three (dimensional) approaches to the definition of political corruption. These classifications, he claims, are founded on legal criteria, public opinion, and the public interest. From a legal standpoint, political corruption is defined as any action that deviates from a political system's formal standard or rule of behavior for its public officials. Political corruption here means an act which deviates from the formal duties of a public officer by favoring private interests (personal, close family, private clique), pecuniary or status gains; or that which violates rules against the exercise of certain types of public role using his influence (Nye 1967).

The above assertion has been severally criticized and satirized by scholars. For example, Jackson et al (1994) notes that an illegal act may not be corrupt: According to him:

*“Worse still, using law as the standard of corruption supports the assertion that everything that is legal is permitted. The legal foundation of political corruption is simultaneously too narrow*

*and broad, excluding too much (the unethical but legal) and including the too much (the Legal but not unethical”.* pg. 56)

Critics argue that in many societies, the law lacks legitimacy and consistent meaning which legalism depict little about the social significance of behavior and that public opinion or cultural standards are best for building realistic definitions of corruptions (Peter and Welch, 1978). However, in layman's terms, corruption refers to the use of one's position to collect a bribe from someone who is in need of aid, such as someone seeking admission to a higher institution or work in a business. Corruption extends beyond this as aptly captured by the World Bank (2005: 29) thus:

*“The abuse of public office for private gains. Public is abused for private gains when official accepts, edicts or extorts bribes to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantages and Profit. Public office can also be abused for the personal benefits even if no bribery occurs through patronage and nepotism, the thief of the state assets or the diversion of state revenue”.*

Salisu (2000) encapsulates corruption to mean the mismanagement of public funds for private gain. In Nigeria, for example, cash intended for development purposes are pocketed by politicians at the expense of the country's development. In line with this, a political system is considered to be corrupt when the majority of the public believes so. This perspective also has several flaws, such as the inability to distinguish between elite and mass opinion. In many nations, what is considered public opinion turns out to be the opinion of the elites. This is the crux of the matter in Nigeria because the elites are the real problem of Nigeria, because it is the elites that heat up the polity, they control public opinion and manipulate it through the ownership of media houses. What is taken to be public opinion in many societies is oftentimes the opinion of the elites, since public opinion determines what law becomes and what dictates the public interest, it has a claim to be the final text for corruption (Jackson et al, 1994).

Corruption is literally condemned in Nigeria by all and sundry, the elites, one way or the other continue to perpetuate it as legitimate way of making wealth and appendage and pecks of political office and for those that occupies the office the endemic and pandemic corruption has impeded development in Nigeria and reduced the giant of Africa to a dwarf and a laughing stock among the comity of nations to the extent that Nigerian citizens are brutalized, mocked and humiliated abroad because it is assumed (rightly too) that Nigerians are running from abject poverty and destitution at home.

Development has long been regarded as one of the most confusing expressions in social science discourse, sparking controversy among scholars of various perspectives and disciplines. Human society's development is a multi-faceted subject, not a one-sided one. Individuals perceive development as increase in the skill and ability; they view it as maximum freedom, the ability to create responsibility and so on (Lawal, 2007, Schumpeter, 1934). Development has been quite similar to the older concept of ‘progress’ or advancement and there has been some effort to give the concept a precession. The literature on development demonstrates that it is a fuzzy idea to a significant extent. As a result, a variety of theories or paradigms have developed to describe what

this entails. The concept has been clarified through the use of several definitions. Some academics equate growth with development in this aspect, defining it as a rise in total per capita income or output. Others prefer to identify structured changes as a major component of development, arguing that growth (increase in output) must be accompanied with structural changes - reduction in poverty, inequality, unemployment, access to basic social amenities amongst others (Nye, 1967; Lawal 2007).

Dudley (1997) sees development to mean not only capital accumulation and economic growth but also the condition in which people in a country have adequate food and job and the income inequality among them is greatly reduced. It is the process of bringing about long-term and profound societal changes. Development encompasses growth, embraces such aspect of life as social justice, equality of opportunity for all citizens, equitable distribution of income and the democratization of the development process in all ramifications (Nnadozie, 1990, Lawal & Tobi 2001).

National development, on the other hand, refers to a country's or nation's ability to increase people's social welfare by providing social amenities such as good education, power/electricity, and pipe borne water, employment, security of lives and properties, to list but a few. Economic development, socio-cultural empowerment and development, and their impact on human development are all aspects of a country's development. National progress can be hampered or defeated without a nation's or its citizens' human capital. In fact, human development is one basis for judging the effectiveness of the economic development component of national development (Imhonopi and Urim, 2010; Ogboru, 2007, Ranis et al 2000). Sustainable development is also associated with another version of development as it refers to the economic growth pattern where the use of resources meets the needs of the human population, while conserving the environment at the same time. Sustainable development means that resources are used in such a way that both current and future human resources can be met in a continuous nature (Mohammed, 2013). Underdevelopment, on the other hand, occurs when a country's potential or resources are not properly utilized for the benefit of all citizens. The absence of development is not the same as underdevelopment (Rodney, 1973).

Human society's development is a multifaceted process. Individually, it entails enhanced ability and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility, and material well-being, as previously stated. Quality of life, equality, economic distribution, and social justice are all aspects of development in human civilization. At the same time, development entails economic, political, and cultural transformation (Egharevba, 2007; Sahs, 2005). But economists differ on the concepts of development. Economists argue that development cannot and should not be confused with growth. This is because the problem in Nigeria is that the concept of "development" is based on material things rather than people. It should be something like purposeful and thoughtful use of nature to meet human requirements. It should not be seen as an item to be possessed like a new car but sustained effort towards a clearly defined national goal (Raji, 1999). Similarly, Todaro (1977), notes that development must be conceived as a multi-dimensional process involving changes in situations, attitudes and institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty.

Hodder, (2000) also posited that development is an economic, social or political process which results in a cumulative rise in the perceived standard of living for an increasing proportion of a

population. This term implies that improving one's level of life entails both a social and political as well as an economic process. This rise in the level of living must be long-term and cumulative, rather than just transient. As a result, development must be viewed as an overall qualitative improvement in a people's or a political community's lives, with the goal of addressing concerns of social welfare, equality, and justice. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "the underlying goal of development should be the creation of an enabling and empowering environment in which all individuals, particularly the poor and vulnerable, can live healthy and creative lives" (UNDP, 1997).

### **Corruption and Development: The Nexus**

Political corruption occurs within the realm of political power. It arises when politicians and government decision-makers, who have the authority to develop, adopt, and implement laws on behalf of the people, are corrupt themselves. It can also happen when policy and laws are crafted to favor politicians and legislators. Political corruption is sometimes compared to greedy corruption since it impacts the way decisions are made. It also tampers with democratic structures, rules of process, and government institutions. Political corruption takes different forms or manifest in different ways in modern societies. These include; bribery which is the taking or giving of money in exchange for favor, kickbacks, gratuities, pay-offs, sweeteners, palm-greasing, and other similar practices common in Nigeria. It also includes fraud, tricks, swindles, and deception, as well as commandeering, racketeering, smuggling, and document forgery/falsification.

Others are embezzlement which is the theft of public funds by government personnel. It occurs when a state official steals from the coffers of the public institution where he or she works. This is one of Nigeria's most well-known and widespread kinds of political corruption; extortion which is when money or resources are obtained through coercion, violence, or the threat of using force. It's frequently referred to as "extraction from below." This is quite frequent among security services such as the police, customs security services, and state security services, among others and favoritism which refer to the power-abusing strategy that entails a severely skewed distribution of state resources. Because of cleavages resulting from familial, blood, ethnic, religious, and other primal factors, this is a fairly prevalent practice (Dike, 1999; Diamond, 2004).

The rise in public administration with the advent of western education can be related to the nexus between political corruption and development, expansion of the polity, urbanization, monetized economy, international trade and growth in political powers and authority where public servants and politicians wield much power and influence over the years in Nigeria from colonial administration of less than 400 civil servants to 36 states, 774 local governments and bloated federal civil service workforce and other agencies and parastatals who wield power and influence over everything in Nigeria. This gave them power, authority, influence, liberty and unlimited access to state fund and resources which they plunder because of lack of strict control and penalties.

The import of the deep seated corruption in Nigeria is that development strides have been stalled and stunted because of the capital flight, fund diversion, abandon project moribund programs and overall retrogression in development. This is because development plans and programs are beautifully articulated on paper but poorly or never executed because officials involved either compromise the standards or never bother to execute the projects and programs like the 16 billion dollars' power sector scandal, the refinery turn around maintenance, aluminum smelting company in Akwa Ibom State and the Ajaokuta Steel Complex among other abandoned and moribund development ventures caused by massive corruption.

### **Political Corruption and Development: The Nigerian Experience**

Corruption in Nigeria has witnessed monumental increase both in quality and intensity with devastating consequences on human and physical development. Although the principles of human and infrastructural social development revolve or center on the advancement of the citizenry's living standards, the endemic and pandemic nature of corruption in Nigerian society is, to put it mildly, one of the country's greatest dangers to development. Corruption is a serious problem in Nigeria at all levels. This social problem, which is not unique to Nigeria, can be found in all societies, but in varied degrees. Nigeria is a country where human society is inexorably sinking deeper and deeper into corruption and ruin. Thus, the greater the development plans the larger the scale of corruption which their implementation encourages by diverting efforts that are being made for the benefit of the community to private gains at the community's expense (Smith, 1976; Onimajesin, 2011).

As a result, there is a strong link between financial and political corruption and the development of a country. Bribery, illegal and greedy acquisition of public funds into private pockets of politicians, government workers, and their cronies and collaborators, which would have been invested for the public welfare, is the essence of political corruption. Political corruption damages democracy and the legitimacy of the state, diminishes economic growth potential, and poses a threat to the social welfare delivery system, citizens' freedom, and security, all of which add up to a clog in the wheel of national development (Adesote and Abimbola, 2012). Political corruption affects democracy and good governance in very profound ways. For example, elections essentially have become reduced to three things – administrative process and highly technological powers of manufacturing figures unrelated to actual ballots; an expensive race to finagle three or four votes from panels of five or seven judges, and whichever option is available or feasible they become tools for approaching a veneer of public legitimacy to plunder government coffer few decades ago.

The effect/impact of corruption in Nigeria has resulted in the backwardness and underdevelopment status of Nigeria. Public spending on recurrent and capital projects and expenditures is reduced by corruption. Political corruption, for example, has an impact on education because government officials spend more on items to make place for graft and settlements. This is simply accomplished by diverting government funds to places where bribes may be easily collected. Fraud is easy to commit on large, difficult-to-manage projects like airports and motorways. Furthermore, poverty and income disparities are linked to corruption hence gradually Nigerians are drifting more and more into penury, squalor and abject poverty in the midst of plenty. In Nigeria, development projects are frequently made inaccessibly complex in order to justify corruption and large expenditures. The National Stadium in Abuja, for

example, is alleged to have consumed millions of dollars more than was required. The Aladja and Ajaokuta steel mills, the five Refineries and power sector's unending problems are classic examples of profound impacts of political corruption in Nigeria.

The political class especially the so-called parliamentarians and political office holders are the protagonists and progenitors of political corruption. The Senators and members of House of Representatives are yet to explain to Nigerians how their constituency development funds are used. This is the height of political corruption.

### **Political Corruption and Development: Policy Options for Nigeria**

To remedy these political corruption anomalies, the following recommendations for policy and development are hereby proffered.

- (i) There should be no sacred cows in the arrest and prosecution of corrupt political office holders.
- (ii) The anti-graft agencies should be made to bite hard and not to bark aloud only. Many of the ex-governors accused of corruption are now Senators and hence "honorable men" in the society.
- (iii) Each government office, department, agencies, organizations and all establishments (private and public) should have anti-graft committee and panels to enforce the ideals of anti-corruption.
- (iv) Contracts involving all government agencies and enterprises should be subjected to a transparent bidding process that will check contract splitting and inflation as a matter of policy with a legal framework.

### **Conclusion**

Corruption in all ramifications is evil and anti-people, anti-progress and retrogressive. Hence corruption impedes development, truncate progress and create moribund aspirations and goals of the societies and nations where it is endemic. Nigerian political corruption is not only endemic; it is also pandemic and pervasive. This is why it is negatively affecting development in Nigeria. The hydra-headed political corruption in Nigeria is not only evil, it is a phenomenon that must be extinguished and eradicated by all and sundry. This is the only way the much needed development and advancement can be attained in Nigeria. The people and government of Nigeria should fight corruption head-on with all available arsenals, weapons and general will before corruption sinks the entire country.

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