

Towards Curbing Corruption in Nigeria: The Role of History and Intergroup Education

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Abstract

Corruption over the years has been one of the most serious problems faced by Nigeria. It has penetrated into the fabric of virtually all sectors of the Nigeria's economy, hence, making them unproductive as well as underdeveloped. The result is that, there is disconnect between the government and the governed. Today, it is alarming and palpable the way most Nigerians have remained unconscious of the processes that shaped their History. This development calls for an urgent attention because Nigeria can hardly develop without the active participation of its citizens, who needs to be worked upon (freed from corruption) for the revitalization and sustenance of the economy and the superstructures. It is against the above statement that this research is being undertaken. The paper started by taking a brief look at the conceptual issues of Corruption and History Education, and then allowed a sense of history to prevail in addressing the question of corruption in Nigeria. To achieve this, myriad historical source materials (primary, secondary and tertiary) were used. At the end of this discourse, it is assumed that, this will form the basis for the formation of appropriate national ideology, understanding the historical processes and realities that have brought and sustained the country together and a guide for the formation of relevant policies expected to enhance greater cohesion all over the country.

Introduction

Nigeria has huge potentials and resources to afford its people a decent and qualitative life. It has huge potentials which if well harnessed and utilized, can make it to be one of the richest and developed countries in the world. Nigeria is the most populous Black Country in Africa and the world in general, with over 150 million people. It is also blessed with mineral deposits (the sixth largest oil producing country in the world).¹

Nigeria is also blessed with arable land for agricultural purposes. It is counted as one of the most religious, having good vegetation and with well connected water-ways, as well as man power, among others. But, ironically, Usman observes

that about 80% of the Nigeria's population lives in the rural areas where such social amenities as portable drinking water, health facilities, electricity and motorable roads, among others, are non-existent. Worse more, Wilmot also noted that more than 60% of Nigerians were/are poor, illiterates and live on less than one U.S. dollar (\$1) per day.²

It is a known fact that no advanced country in the world today relegates the study of its history to the background in virtually all stages of her development. This is because History deals with the study of man (a social being) who is very complex and difficult to predict and measure. Therefore, anyone who is studying history must first of all become familiar with what happened in the past, then he can attempt to explain why things happened the way they did. This has however made it expedient for every country to work extremely hard in inculcating the knowledge of History into the minds of her citizenry; through which the spirit of patriotism, hard work, loyalty, endurance. These and other values are catalyst for combating corruption in any society. A lot has been said on corruption by various scholars, about its origin, nature, causes, effects and the possible ways forward. But, the fundamental issue that needs to be raised is how History Education becomes indispensable for curbing the menace of corruption in Nigeria. Until this is carefully and clearly unfolded, stretched-out and unveiled, understanding the reasons/basis why things are still looking the way they are, in their present formation may not be palpable.³

Conceptual Clarification

Corruption as a concept has been defined by various scholars on the basis of their experience, orientations, perceptions, environments and the factor of time. Corruption is "efforts to secure Wealth or power through illegal means": private gain at public expense". It is "a violation of established rules for personal gain and profits". Similarly, corruption is any "anti- social behaviour conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms. And which undermines the authorities capacity to secure the welfare of all citizens". However, this definition has been enlarged to cover the abuse of all offices of trust, including 'private offices'. This is due to the fact that 'the scope' of corruption has widened.⁴ Still, corruption could be defined as "a behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role.

The above definitions give greater credence to legal and moral persuasion. However, this paper will not indulge in the debate about the limits and weakness of the definitions. Deducing from the definitions, corruption can be viewed as any action, attitude and behaviour that negates and is contrary to socially acceptable values, norms and laws. It is the misuse of our position in the society to further personal interests and gains contrary to societal expectations and laws.⁵

Corruption is multidimensional. According to Aluko the dimensions of corruption in Nigeria include political corruption (grand), bureaucratic corruption (petty), and electoral corruption, is bribery, fraud embezzlement, extortion, favoritism, and nepotism.⁶

Political corruption takes place at the highest levels of political stability. It occurs when the politicians and political decision makers, who are entitled to formulate, establish and implement the laws in the name of the people, are themselves corrupt. It also takes place when policy formulations and legislation are tailored to benefit politicians and legislators. Political corruption is not a recent phenomenon that pervades the Nigerian state. There have been cases of official misuse of resources for personal enrichment.

Bureaucratic corruption occurs more in the public administration at the implementation stage of policies. This kind of corruption has been branded low level and street level. It is the kind of corruption the citizens encounter daily in places like the hospitals, schools, local licensing offices, police, taxing offices, etc. Bureaucratic petty corruption, which is seen as similar to corruption of need, occurs when one obtains a business from public sector through inappropriate procedure.⁷

Electoral corruption includes purchase of votes with money, promises of office or special favours, coercion, intimidation and interference with freedom of election. In Nigeria, votes are bought and people are killed or maimed in the name of election. Losers end up as winners in elections, and voters turn up in areas where votes were not cast. The history of elections in Nigeria is replete with cases of various forms of electoral irregularities and malpractices that have become the bane of democratic consolidation in Nigeria after many years of military interregnum.⁸

Bribery is a white collar crime in which money, a favour or something else of value is promised to be given to, or taken from an individual or corporation in an attempt to sway his or its views, opinions, or decisions. Bribery usually requires two participants: one to give the bribe and the one to take. Bribes may be demanded in order for an official to do something he is already paid to do. They may also be demanded in order to bypass laws and regulations. The endemic nature of corruption in Nigeria makes it difficult to engage in business without resorting to bribes. Bribery is therefore, the payment, in money or kind that is taken of given in a corrupt relationship.⁹ Fraud on the other hand involves some kind of trickery. Swindle and deceit, counterfeiting, racketeering, smuggling and forgery, it is a form of grand deception aimed at unjustly obtaining property and money. Extortion is money and other resources extracted by the use of coercion, violence or threats to use of force. It is often seen as extraction from below. In Nigeria, the police and custom officers are the main culprits. Embezzlement is the theft of public resources by public officials from public institutions in which they are employed. In Nigeria, the embezzlement of public funds is one of the most common ways of economic accumulation, perhaps, due to lack of strict regulatory systems. It is the stealing of entrusted funds and misappropriation of property. Favoritism, on the other hand is a mechanism of power abuse implying a highly biased distribution of state resource. The tendency to favour friends, family, close and trusted persons is however a natural phenomenon.¹⁰

Nepotism is a special form of favouritism in which an office holder prefers relatives and family members. Nepotism, which is common in Nigeria, occurs when one is exempted from the application of certain laws or regulations or given undue

preference in the allocation of scarce resource. Notable, corruption is said to have been as old as Nigeria. According to Joseph, every Nigerian government from the regional administration under colonial rule in the 1950s to the most recent regimes has carried corruption to an unparalleled degree. The point of departure for the appreciation of the dynamics of corruption in Nigeria is its colonial history. This process led to the emergence of two public in Africa such that while the primordial public was built on a system of accountability and control based on moral principles, the civil public became a contested terrain for private accumulation based on moral principles. This marked the beginning of official corruption in Nigeria and the idea of a privatized state began to manifest.¹¹ A state is said to be privatized when “it is appropriate to the service of private interest by the dominant faction of the elite”. For the colonialist to draw legitimacy to this lactone it had to carry along ūrst the traditional rulers, who were used as tools under indirect rule system and later public servants, corrupt practices from the colonial regime”.¹² The growth rate of national wealth-so typical in Nigeria, following the sharp increase in oil revenue is strongly and positively associated with the trends in Nigeria corruption”. This agrees with Ibrahim’s position that “the structural evolution of the polity” with regard to the over concentration of power in the centre, provided for a culture of unbridled corruption and fettered democracy”. Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria has its roots in the politics of prebendalism and patrimonialism.

The endemic nature of corruption in Nigeria has helped to generate a lot of contributions from scholars as to its causes. It is noteworthy that the causes of corruption in the country like its various dimensions are not new to Nigerians. Lack of access to economic opportunities, absence of the rule of law, transparency and accountability in government and business, the obsession to get rich quick by Nigerians, the crave for materialism that has become the order of the day and the unnecessary pressure mounted on people in places of authority by families, friends and well-wishers are some of the common causes of corruption. Other causes of corruption; all fundamentally flawed structure of the Nigeria state government and politics and the absence of functioning government systems, conflict between changing values and moral codes.¹³

Factors that Promote Corruption

In Nigeria, like in many other African countries, greed and ostentatious life style are seen as the root causes of corruption. Many writers have posited that, societies in love with ostentatious life style may delve into corrupt practices to feed the life style and also embrace a style of public sleaze and lack of decorum. In identifying the factors that promoted corruption in Africa, has attribute the following practices in third world countries, including Nigeria to:

- i. **Culture or Cultural Practices** Culture is something we learn through our social processes. It defines what we grow up to consider as immoral. Through the social processes we develop our values and beliefs. Becoming corrupt in the third world countries is almost very easy because morality is relaxed in the society and most of the time, people struggle for

survival without assistance from the state. An example of culture that encourages corruption is the “spraying” of money at parties or marriage and burial ceremonies. The influences of the extended family system which are very common in African countries is another contributing factor to corrupt system in Africa and indeed Nigeria. Corruption is linked to the strong family values that have feelings to fulfill the obligation attached there to. According to Edwin, the Nigerian culture is a fertile ground for corruption. Giving gifts to clients and others for services rendered, or, as a show of gratitude is normal in the society. Today, politicians now play some of the roles of clients and gift is now money, Thus value system has an impact on corruption in Nigeria. Value system, has become part of the culture, such that the society does not check the background of rich individuals. Once a wealthy man comes up in a society he is instantly given a chair of fame or honour to the extent that chieftaincy titles await him where ever he goes. The church and mosques hail him and always give him recognition and honour. They pray for him. The Machiavellian principle of the ‘end justifies the means’ manifest itself in this part of the world.¹⁴

- ii. **Greed and Ostentatious Lifestyle** This factor is also influenced by culture. Our culture encourages greed and selfishness. People in high places are worshiped and not subjected to the normal due processes that obtain in other cultures. How you accumulate wealth is of no consequence. The wealthier you are, the more honour is bestowed on you. Because our society is in love with ostentatious lifestyle, people delve into corrupt practices to feed the lifestyle and also embrace a style of public sleaze and lack of decorum. Wealthy citizens may resort to sleaze in order to gain power and protect their interest. All these are common practices in Nigeria.¹⁵
- iii. **Poor Reward System** Nigeria is one of the poorest paying countries in the world. This is a country where there is no man – hour value as economic reward. Also even the monthly meager salary is not even regular in some places, thereby giving room to workers to make ends meet by compromising their duties to meet up with the exigencies of their daily obligation. The fear of not getting your gratuity and pension on time after retirement make some public servants to engage in corruption in an attempt to amass wealth and kept in bank accounts or acquire some property.¹⁶
- iv. **Lack of Strong Institutions to Deal with Corruption** issues The lukewarm attitude of the officers charged with enforcing the laws and bring probility has rather aided corruption. The executive, legislature, judiciary Police, law enforcement agents and other public officials sometime treat cases of corruption with laziness fair and lackadaisical attitude especially if such offence involves highly placed and influential persons. Most reports on investigations of corrupt practices in Nigeria, both public and private, as well as those by National Assembly and even the State Assemblies in

most instances fizzle out. Some of the recent examples include the PTDF investigations. Senator Nwabara's scandals, Energy sector probe by the National Assembly, murder of Chief Bola Ige, and the ongoing scandal surrounding the fuel subsidy probe etc. Even the EFCC and ICPC are not immuned to the Nigerian syndrome because the two anti – graft agencies have been severally accused of selective trials or been used to which hunt political opponents while government supporters continue to loot. For example all the cases of corruption against some of the former state Governors are being frustrated by the authority. Nigeria's general election use to be one of the most corrupt system of election worldwide. Party officials, INEC officials and the police as well as the electorates are easy pray for compromise once they are 'settled'.¹⁷

- v. **Lack of Accountability and Transparency** If people are not required to account for their stewardship corruption will flourish. There is likelihood that their authority will have no limit. Nigeria some of the largest public corporations like National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) now Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) and the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) have never published their audited accounts despite the fact that it is a duty they owe the citizens. The problem is that those who are supposed to enforce the requirement for such corporations to produce audited accounts are essentially the same people whose hands are in the till. Most government(s) ministries and organizations lack a transparent system of administration. The biggest corruption deterrents when civil servants, ministries and all senior management in government corporations know that they are under scrutiny. Many journalists have been detained in Nigeria for reporting the obvious. Nigeria does not belong to group of countries that recognition independent external institutions that investigate cases of corruption. Again, no implementation of budget by the government is a serious problem that encourages corruption and breach the principle of accountability.¹⁸

- vi. **Trade Restrictions** This is government induced sources of rent seeking corruption. The restrictions on importation of foreign automobiles are examples of how government officials and politicians can make quick money via rent seeking corruption.¹⁹

- vii. **Government Subsidies**

When government allocates scarce resources to individuals and firms using legal criteria other than the ability or willingness to pay, corruption is likely to be the result. Corruption can thrive under industrial policies that allow poorly targeted subsidies to be appropriated by firms or entrepreneurs for which they are not targeted. In Nigeria, we have the example of the petroleum industry that has been lingering over the years and which has been a major source of corruption in the country. For instance, at the wake of the oil subsidy probe by the National Assembly, it was discovered that in 2011, the country paid subsidy on 59 million liters.²⁰

Highlight on Efforts at Curbing Corruption in Nigeria

It will be unhistorical here to pretend that the successive Nigerian governments have not put the necessary institutional framework in place to check the tide of the social monster/national eclipse. Such institutional apparatus put in place to curb corruption by successive Nigeria's governments include among others the Jaji Declaration in 1977 by the former president Olusegun Obasanjo, Ethical Revolution of Shehu Shagari in 1981-1983, War Against Indiscipline by Muhammadu Buhari in 1984, National Orientation Movement by Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida in 1987, War Against indiscipline and Corruption in 1996 by Sani Abacha. The Anti Corruption Act by Obasanjo in the year 2000. The Act seeks to prohibit and prescribed punishment for corrupt practices and other related offences. It also established National Orientation Agency, Economic and Financial Crime Commission, National Agency for Food and Drug Administration, Public Complaint Commission and Code of Conduct Bureau, Independent Corrupt Practices Commission and other related Offences Commission (ICPC) and the much publicized Re-branding Nigeria". But, the question still remains what is the place of History Education in Government's effort to curb corruption.²¹

Despite the huge resources invested in the project of curbing corruption, Nigerians still wallow in abject poverty, insecurity, ethno-religious conflicts, high crimes, among others. Desperation is written boldly on the faces of Nigerians. As a result, Nigeria is still widely recognized by the international community as one of the most corrupt nations in the world. According to Transparency International. Nigeria is ranked as the second most corrupt country in the world for three years i.e. 2000, 2001 and 2002 and consecutively has maintained that unenviable position to date. High income concentration among small groups of businessmen and politicians is noticeable. Unemployment and underemployment still loom large and lack of executive capacity is the order of the day. It is plausible to contend here that part of the problems emanate from lack of effective History Education at all the levels of our educational institutions; primary, secondary and tertiary institutions and the government system.²²

Now, the situation is worrisome that even under the present democratic dispensation, the Legislative members and Anti-Corruption Agencies are caught deeply involved in corruption. After swearing to work judiciously by promulgating laws and policies to curb corruption they, themselves turned to become law breakers.

The Role of History and Intergroup Education in Curbing Corruption in Nigeria

Uche, among others, captured vividly the whole essence of History Education when he remarked that:

History is to people what knowledge is to individual, a nation with no knowledge of their past would suffer from collective amnesias, cropping blindly into the future without guide posts of precedence to shape their course. For a people to be without history is to be ignorant of their origin,

condemn forever to commit the same problems... as it is difficult to imagine history without civilization, so it is difficult to imagine civilization and progress without history.²³

Corruption has defied solution and is spreading like wildfire. This is because History Education has been denied its rightful place to combat corruption in the Nigeria's educational system and this has brought about failure of the anti-Graft agencies to prosecute all culprits. For example, according to Udo, who shared the same view with Gbile on the importance of education, said:

The education section is a very sensitive one because an error could have the effect of destroying the future of young persons and perhaps it is in this area that Nigerian education has suffered most. Education policies seemed to have been made without the least regards for the unintended effects they might have and implementation had then been rushed using the slogan-with immediate effect.²⁴

Moreover, most of the ex-governors and their collaborators who have been accused of corruption and arraigned in courts have not been prosecuted. They are shamelessly recycling and given higher positions to themselves as senators and ministers. On the contrary, correctional houses are filled with poor people, who have been accused of minor offences. But, it is the lacuna in the judiciary system that has made corruption to thrive unabated in the nation". No wonder, today, Nigeria has traded her dignifying values of diligence, patriotism, high ethical standards for inglorious habits.²⁵

Ladan, in the same vein, also buttressed that before the attainment of the independence of Nigeria on 1st October, 1960, the dominant historiographical tradition in Nigeria's intellectual scholarship was colonialism- the implantation of the machinery of exploitation in the soil of the colonized. According to Aùgbo cited by Ladan reiterated that most of What came out and was committed to writing as well as taught in Nigeria was from the official mind of imperialists. It was a historiography that saw the historical development of African people including Nigeria as made up largely of conflict and violent struggle between races and ethnic groups.²⁶

Ayandele has argued- that the basic philosophical issue in Nigeria's education emphasizes integrating the individual into a sound and effective citizen and providing equal educational opportunities for all citizens of the nation at the primary through secondary and tertiary levels. The national policy on education, which has direct correlation with the national goals, aspires to attain; a free and democratic society, just and egalitarian society, united, strong and self-reliant nation, a great and dynamic economy, and a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens.²⁷

To concretize these objectives, Nigeria's education must be tailored towards self-realization of national economic efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, patriotism, national unity, social and political progress, science and technological advancement and internalization of ethical values. Most of

these virtues are in no small measure what effective History Education inculcates in the Nigerian citizenry aimed at eradicating, among other vices, the menace of corruption in the country.²⁸

The Way Forward

Since the seemingly greatest obstacle to the development of Nigeria state is traceable to corruption, it is only on moral regeneration that we can find solution to it. This has become imperative if the country is to make any meaningful progress in the 21st century.

Some of the Measures Necessary to Convert Includes:

1. Social Transformation

Transformation in the education system is a necessary factor in social transformation. there is need for reformation, orientation and re – orientation of the minds and hearts of Nigerians, for them to see that corruption is the enemy of development. In this regard all school should return to the teaching of the moral education to empower children with the spirit of stewardship, while adults live exemplary lives, reflecting truth, kindness, dignity of labour and integrity.

2. Enforcement of Anti – Corruption law

It is very unfortunate that corruption has come to stay in this country. Apparently everywhere is infested with this anti-productive menace. This is largely due to the fact that anti – corruption law is not often enforced. Here, we mean the law should be enforced to its fullest without fear or favour. The ICPC and EFCC Acts have stipulated the types of punishments to be applied against those found guilty of corrupt practices. But some times because of legal restrictions, the anti – graft agencies find it difficult to apply the law. The National Assembly should make a legislation empowering the EFCC to enforce appropriate punishments against the offenders. In addition, we should support the introduction of capital punishment in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. According to the former EFCC Chairperson, Mrs Farida Waziri, the application of capital punishment will solve the problems of corruption in Nigeria. She stated that, if some twenty (20) high profile offenders are tried and sentenced to death, this will send shock waves to Nigerians and curb both the impunity and intolerable prevalence of corruption in Nigeria. The problem with the direct Rawlings solution is that it would involve a military coup, which is not what is being suggested here. But based on empirical evidences of how Ghana has benefited from the Rawlings solution to corruption one can recommend it to Nigeria in a civilian form. Above all, the ongoing transformations in Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Syria and other countries should serve as lessons to us. Therefore, it is either we adopt the Rawlings' solution through the civil process as suggested by Waziri, or we may face something worse in the near future.

3. Improvement on the General Condition of Living

The improvement of the socio political and economic conditions of the people of Nigeria is another weapon against corruption in the society. There is every hope that the multiplying effects of this improvement will reduce the tendency of public servants to demand and take bribes and get involved in other corrupt practices.

Conclusion

To some people, Corruption has become the commonest feature of life in Nigeria. From what we have discussed, this assertion is not far from the truth. Evidences abound to show that, Nigeria is far from achieving success in the crusade against corruption, despite the presence of the anti – graft agencies like EFCC and ICPC, in addition to the Nigeria Police. This is due to the prevalence of some practices that promote corruption in the country. The menace had continued to impact negatively on the country’s development and it has become a serious stumbling block in the process of nation building and entrenchment of virile democracy in Nigeria. Some of the adverse effects of corruption on social and economic development include: diversion of development resources for private gain; misallocation of talent; tax revenue; negative impact on quality of infrastructure and public services; and slowing of economic growth. To really address the problem of elite corruption in contemporary Nigerian society, the issues of morality must be taken seriously. The prosperity of a country depends on the moral disposition of its people. Every society must be organized around moral principles as its foundation. These include the principles of honesty, integrity, altruism, and selfless service.

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