SYSTEMIC CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: A THREAT TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

D. G Keeper

Dept. of Public Administration, Rivers State College of Arts & Science, Port Harcourt, Nigeria
E-mail: owajierch@yahoo.com

Abstract

It is not exaggeration of the tragic events of the country since independence, to say that all efforts to establish a just and efficient administration have been frustrated by corruption. The evil exists in every facet of our society. You bribe to get your child into a school, you pay to secure a job and you also continue to pay in some cases to retain it. Corruption is an act which deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of some one in a position of public authority because of private regarding motives such as wealth, power or status. Sustainable development in human society is not a one sided process rather multi-sided issues; individuals perceive development as increase in the skill and ability, it is viewed as maximum freedom, the ability to create responsibility. This paper tries to look at the issues affecting sustainable development in Nigeria. The author viewed the concept of corruption, the causes as well as the effects of corruption on the economy.

Keywords: Corruption, Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a typical of a country in Africa whose development has been undermined and retrain by the menace of corrupt practices. Without doubt, corruption has permeated the Nigerian society and in the words of Achebe any one who can say that corruption in Nigeria has not yet been alarming is either a fool; a crook or else does not live in this country. The situation has become bad to the extent that as far back 1993, keeping an average Nigeria from being corrupt and a goat from eating yam (Achebe, 1988). It is not exaggeration of the tragic events of the country since independence, to say that all efforts to establish a just and efficient administration have been frustrated by corruption. The evil exists in every facet of our society. You bribe to get your child into a school, you pay to secure a job and you also continue to pay in some cases to retain it. You pay 10 percent of every contract obtained, you dash the tax officer to avoid paying taxes, you pay the hospital doctor and nurse to get proper attention, and you pay the policemen to evade arrest, this catalogue of shame can continue with an end (Tokunbo, 1972).

The prevalence of these activities in various aspects of our lives has a tremendous adverse effect on the quality of life of this country, our living standards and national psyche. Corruption brings a nation no good. The resources meant for water supply, roads, education, health and other basic and social services that are captured and stolen by a handful of Nigerians through corrupt acts stultify economic and social development hence creeping poverty all over the place. It is saddening when a certain Australian national can come to our shores and say he was prevailed upon by his Nigerian principals then in government to inflate a contract by the pricey sum of N5.5bn amounts to the highest form of disservice to our country and portrays us as a people who hold down the horns of our parents cow for others to
milk (Ekwueru & Daminabo, 2008). What a colossal loss that could have been meaningfully utilized for developmental purposes. In addition to distorting the market place, weakening the economy, encouraging capital flight and discouraging foreign investment corruption undermines our democracy and promotes mediocrity and bad policies made by bad representatives. These translate to compromise of good governance and extol criminal enterprise in our society as well as being responsible for failed projects for which Nigerian is notorious.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Like most concepts in the social science, corruption does not have a single-agreeable definition, Ofoeze (2004:20) sees corruption as referring to “any action or inaction of any person, or group (public or private) deliberately perpetrated to secure advantages for oneself, a relation, associate or group(s) in a manner that detract from the accepted regulations, morals, and/or ethical standard or code and hence constituting a travesty of justice, equity and fair play”. Corruption is also seen as “effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means, private gain at public expense, or misuse of public power for private benefit” (Lipset & Lenz, 2000:112). The US Vice President Al Gore is of the view that corruption is a serious crime with devastating consequence. Speaking at the Global Forum of Fighting Corruption, he says it is “a cold vicious, often violent sacrifice of citizen security for a narrow, greedy, private, personal profit on the part of a crooked official” (Zhang 1996 in Tony, 2008:40). The ICPC Act (2000:25) saw corruption as a multi-faceted phenomenon that ranges from the giving and accepting of bribe to other kinds of fraudulent practices.

Corruption is an act which deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of some one in a position of public authority because of private regarding motives such as wealth, power or status (Khan, 1996). Black and Garner (2000) affirm corruption as an official or fiduciary person who unlawfully or wrongfully uses his station or character to procure some benefit for himself or for another person, contrary to duty and lights of others. The Act went further to posit that corruption covers any illegal use of power by any person(s) for personal or arbitrary purposes. On his part, Toyo (2006:2) posited that corruption “consist of depravity, venality or peculation in playing a social role”. According to him the act normally involves some kind of cover up or diversionary conduct such as falsification, hypocrisy, tyranny, or violence to men or property.

Besides operationalizing corruption, Toyo (2006:6) went further to pontificate that the concept is fostered by a particular economic system capitalism noted for its avaricious credo and emphasis on individualism. Consequently, he insists, Nigeria as a peripheral capitalist country cannot but be immersed in corruption. The logical implication of Toyo’s postulation is that the inequalities in socio-economic status which income of the higher and lower income earners in the country is an added impetus for corruption. Where most civil servants are paid starvation wages, as in Nigeria, it can also serve as a stimulus to bribe taking in order to keep up with the joneses. It is thus not surprising that in spite of measures put in place to check-mate the scourge of corruption such as oath system for public official and the code of conduct statue enshrined in the 1999 constitution, corruption has continued unabated. Corruption occurs in many forms and it has contributed immensely to the poverty and misery of a large segment of the Nigerian population.
It is the misappropriation of government property or revenues made possible through government regulations (Braguinsky, 1996). Otite states that corruption is the perversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favor or moral depravity. It takes place when two parties have interacted to change the structure or process of society or the behaviour of functionaries in order to produce dishonest, unfaithful or undefiled situations. Corruption transcends bribery but includes treasury looting and the deliberate bending of rules of the system to favour friends or hurt foes. It is clearly an absence of accountability, law and order (Otite, 2000).

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Sustainable development in human society is not a one-sided process rather multi-sided issues; individuals perceive development as increase in the skill and ability, it is viewed as maximum freedom, the ability to create responsibility. Seer (1977), states that sustainable development involves capital accumulation and economic growth only but the condition in which people in a country have adequate food, job and income inequality among them is greatly reduced. It is the process of bringing fundamental and sustainable changes in the society. It encompasses growth and embraces the quality of life as social justice, equality of opportunity for all citizens, equitable distribution of income and the democratization of development processes. It is the capacity of members of the society to actualize them by participating actively in the social engineering of their destiny. It entails the ability of individuals to influence and manipulate the forces of nature for their enhancement and that of humanity. Economic, political or social development implies more changes in the technical and institutional arrangement by which it is produced. In spite of various concepts, sustainable development is a multi-dimensional and is basically about the process of changes around the spheres of societal life.

**CORRUPTION**

This paper employs a theoretical explanation of corruption in Nigeria education system. Corruption will be analyzed as “functionalist theory”. Functionalist approach sees corruption as emanating from the social structure of the society, which exerts a definite pressure upon certain individuals in the society to engage in non-conforming conduct. Merton (1957) puts its in another way when he assert that a society in which there is an exceptionally strong emphasis upon specific goals without corresponding institutional procedures, will inevitably leads to what Durkerm called norm less or deviation. Each culture establishes goals and interests which member of society are encouraged to pursue and prescribes the method to be followed in seeking these approved objectives. It is when these means fail to match the goal of the individual in question that the individual becomes socially disorganized (Meitoba, 2000). As a matter of fact, the Nigerian society tends to over emphasize individual goal attainment at the expense of the legitimate means of achieving these set goals. In Nigeria, material acquisition has become the ultimate goal and the society does not appear to be concerned with how one “makes” it. All that is important is that one has “arrived”. The marked discrepancy believe the goals and means in our society invariably leads to various forms of corruption such as embezzlement of public fund, offering and acceptance of bribe, electoral rigging, examination malpractice, drug abuse (Agbonifo, 1985).
Types, Nature and Characteristics of Corruption

Some researchers have taken a holistic (broader) approach in the discussion of corruption by dividing it into man forms and sub-divisions. These according to Taylor (2010) include;

**Political corruption:** This takes the highest levels of political authority. 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 formulation and legislation is tailored to benefit politicians and legislators. (The Encyclopedia Americana 1999)

**Bureaucratic corruption:** This occurs in the public administration or the implementation end of politics. It is the kind of corruption the citizens encounter daily at places like the hospitals, schools, local licensing office, police, the various ministries etc. Bureaucratic corruption occurs when one obtains a business from the public sector through inappropriate procedure (NORAD; 2000 in Victor; 2008).

**Electoral corruption:** This includes buying of votes with money, promises of office special favours, coercion, intimidation, and interference with freedom of election [An example where this practice is common is Nigeria. Votes are bought, people killed or maim in the name of election, losers end up as the winners in elections, and votes turn up in areas where votes were not cast] (The Encyclopedia Americana, 1999, the words in parenthesis are mine).

Other forms of corruption may include

**Bribery:** The payment (in money or kind) that is taken or given in a corrupt relationship. These include “kickbacks”, “gratuities”, “pay off”, “sweeteners”, “greasing palms scratching back” etc (Bayart et al 1997:11)

**Fraud:** This involves some kind of trickery, swindle and deceit counterfeiting, racketeering, smuggling and forgery (Ibid).

**Embezzlement:** This is seen as the theft of public resources by public officials. It is when an official of the state steals from the public institution in which he/she is employed. In Nigeria the embezzlement of public fund is one of the most common ways of wealth accumulation, perhaps, due to lack of strict regulatory systems.

**Extortion:** This is money and other resources extracted by the use of coercion, violence, or threats to use force. It is often seen as extraction from below. (Bayart et al 1997:11) ** Favoritism:** This is mechanism of power abuse implying a highly biased distribution of state resources. However, many see this as a natural human proclivity to favour friends, family, and anybody close and trusted.

**Nepotism:** This is a special sort of favoritism in which a public office holder prefers his/her kinfolk and family members. Nepotism occurs when one is exempted from the application of certain laws or regulations or given undue preference in the allocation of scarce resources (NORAD, Ch.1, Ch.2 Jan. 2000; Amundsen 1997 and Girling 1997).

Causes of Corruption

The causes of corruption are myriad; and they have both political and cultural variables. Some evidence points to a link between corruption and social diversity, ethno linguistic fractionalization, and the proportion of a country’s population adhering to different religious traditions (Upset and Lenz, 2002). Studies, again has noted also that corruption is widespread in most non-democratic countries,
and particularly, in countries that have been branded neo-patrimonial, Kieptocratic, and Prebendal (NORAD, 2000). Thus, the political system and the culture of a society could make the citizens more prone to corrupt activities. However, let us focus on the fundamental factors that engender corrupt practices in less developed nations, including Nigeria. Some of the factors are (i) The great inequality in the distribution of wealth (ii) political office as the primary means of gaining access to wealth; (iii) conflict between changing moral codes; (iv) the weakness of social and governmental enforcement mechanism; and (v) the absence of a strong sense of national community (Bryce 1921). The causes of corruption in Nigeria cannot deviate significantly, if at all, from the above factors. However, obsession with materialism, compulsion for a shortcut to affluence, glorification, and approbation (of ill-gotten wealth) by the general public are among the reasons for the persistence of corruption in Nigeria. (Ndiulor, March 17, 1999).

**Effect of Corruption to National Development**

The consequences of corruption on a nation’s socio-political and economic development are myriad. The foremost effect of corruption is that it not only leads to a reduction in economic growth and development by lowering incentives to invest, it also leads to a divestment in such economies. Serious investors are always wary of offering bribes before being allowed investment rights or operational licenses. This is due to the fact that there is no guarantee that greased officials may keep their side of the agreement, and with no official cover the address in case of contract breach, the fleeced investor is on his own (Eppele, 2006:11). Applied to the above is the fact that foreign investors are also prone to withdraw their capital from a country with high incidence of corruption of corruption because the risk involved in doing business such nations sometimes far outweighs the benefits. Granted that it has been argued that corruption provides both local and foreign investors the leverage to surmount bureaucratic impediments, yet the number of such successful deals is a far cry from the avalanche of investors that have stripped off their hard earned money. Corruption also alters the pattern of government expenditure. Experience has shown that in highly corrupt countries, officials through government funds more into large and hard-to-manage projects, such as airports or highways than on social services like health and education.

It has been a stumbling block to people enjoying the social fruits of good governance (Ibrahim, 2003). Corruption contributes immensely to inhibition of economic performance; it negatively affects investment and economic growth, which is antithetical to national development. If corruption discourages investment, limits economic growth and alters the composition of government spending, I unconsciously hinders future economic growth and sustainable development (SelloTmam, 2004). Corruption contributes to the problem of mass poverty and rendered millions of Nigerian citizen’s unemployed and uneducated. The poverty profile of Nigerians appears to be worsening. The UNDP Development Report 2001 places Nigeria at no 148 out of 173 countries surveyed. The situation worsens in 2003 report, which put Nigeria at 152 among the 175 countries covered in the It is truism that mass poverty has been a breeding ground for all forms of extremism in the frequent outbreak of ethno-religious violence in some parts of Nigeria (FRN, 2001 & Obadan, 2001).
In Nigeria, corruption led to decaying infrastructure, inadequate medical services, falling educational standards, mismanagement of foreign loans, bloated imported bills and public expenditure, reduces production capacity, distortion of the economy through waste and misallocation of resources in 2001, ..4 lost more than N23 billion to corruption (Salu & Aremu, 2004).

**The Cross Road of Corruption**

To arrest this tardiness, we must fall back to the society as a whole. This is because; the school exists as an agent of the larger social, economic ad political context, which fosters them (Levin 1978:24). By implications schools correspond to the, institution of the larger society and serve the functions assigned to them for producing the social, economic and political relationship reflected by the prevailing institutions and ideologies. Implicit in this correspondence principle is what Enoh (2007:8) calls stimulus - response relationship. It cannot be doubted that education is the response to whatever stimulus it receives from the social, economic and political systems. Corruption is now a generated thing were the people who are in power leave seat of government for their relation teaching them the foot step, it has been legalized but we believe no mater how it has eaten deep into the soul of Nigeria, there is still hope lets not give up tomorrow is pregnant better Nigerians are taking the positions of authority and they are taking us to that place we have always dreamt. Before we got to were we are now we were nothing after rain there is sun, not there cums day. Let us not loose faith it will only take time.

The argument here is not that educational change will not have some changes in the political and economic spheres. The truth remains that the changes occur rather subtly and slowly given that it operates through the mind whose transformation c then go to change these elements of society. When the detects of the elements of society, politics, economics and the special systems are approached directly rather than through the mediating role of education, a redounding effect on education would emerge.

**CONCLUSION**

The reality on ground that is that despite our experimentation with various political government institutions and anti corruption campaigns, none has succeeded in reducing let alone eliminate corruption form today’s politics. Nigerian leaders and even followers have not paid any lip service the crusade to find a lasting solution to the service problem of corruption. It cannot be doubted that education is the response to whatever stimulus it receives from the social, economic and political systems, therefore it is obvious that you do not reform a response in order to bring about reforms in the stimulus. This implies that correspondence principle suggests that a given political, social or economic situation will automatically call for the educational system suitable to it. If this is the case and of course it is, all educational reforms are better off being affected through a natural response to whatever changes are going on in the social spheres.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Leadership must display transparency, honesty, probity, accountability, purposefulness and commitment to good ideals of the society before the followers will be convinced of the genuine of such crusade.
2. The predilection for short cuts should be discouraged and made punishable.
3. Family units must rise up to their primary responsibility of giving the first lessons in morality to their wards.
4. The moral fabric of the society should be strengthening through explicit examples of commitment, pragmatism, honesty, justice and fairness.
5. Reward system should be equitable enough where hard work should be adequately compensated and recognized in all facets of our national life.
6. A credible and effective system vigilance mechanism should be put in place.
7. Poverty and unemployment must be seriously tackled, we commend the efforts of federal government for introducing poverty alleviation programme especially for unemployed youths in Nigeria but still the ideals of the programme was defeated by greedy politicians who hijacked it for their kits and kinsmen. Nigerians should avoid being used as perpetrators of corruption, instead be on the vanguard against this ugly trends, it is a battle to be fought by all and with the resources of all so that together we can build a corrupt free society.

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