CORRUPTION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

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Abstract

This paper offers a detailed commentary on the state of corruption in Nigeria. It examined the phenomenon in its various dimensions. It posits that because of monstrous proportion it has assumed in Nigeria, it has hampered growth and development.

Introduction

Corruption which is a global phenomenon has been an important subject of analysis by social scientists. Its history is as old as the world in that. Ancient civilization had traces of wild spread of "illegalties and corruption". It has been ubiquitous in complex societies from Ancient Egypt, Israel, Rome and Greece. It is endemic in all governments and continents, regions and ethnic groups. It cuts across faith, religious denominations and political systems, which affects both the young and old alike. The magnitude of corruption is not equal in every society. Hence some countries or nation-states are more corrupt than others. As George Orwel notes in his widely read book Animal Farm "all animals are equal but some are more equal than others". However, despite corruption being endemic and pandemic, the growing awareness of the necessity to extirpate this cancer has defiled all necessary antidotes and therefore lack of effective control of this very cancer in every Sphere in nations of the world hence making it popular and needs no further explanation as presumed by many that often abuse and misuse the concept. It is against this background that this paper attempts to look at corruption as developmental ills in Nigeria. The work is divided into six segments. The first looks at the introduction. The second is conceptual clarification of corruption and development. The third examines the Schools of Thoughts on development. The causes of corruption are discussed in the fourth segment. The fifth looks at the effects of corruption on development, while final segment are recommendations and concludes the work.

Conceptual Clarifications

(a) Concepts of Corruption

Corruption as a problem is a global phenomenon with varied definitions. It is broadly defined as perversion or change from good to bad. It is a deviation from the norms of behaviour of a given society in regards to the execution of some duty or obligation to that society, particularly where one is put in place of trust. In developing countries it is often believed to arise from the clash or conflict between traditional values and imported norms that accompany modernization and socio-political development. Hagher (2002:20) sees corruption as that state of degradation which human beings descend to when they change from the ideals state of sound moral values and human conduct that express love of God and fellow man to a debased and vitiated state with infected and tainted values and behaviour that express human greed, selfishness, dishonesty, loss of integrity and the giving and receiving of bribes to thwart just proceedings, in order to gain unfair advantage. While Friedrich (1989:15), aptly put corruption as:

A kind of behaviour which deviate from the norm actually prevalent or believed to prevail in a given context, such as the political. It is deviant behaviour associated with a particular motivation or not, it is the fact that private gain was secured at public expenses that matters.

Specifically, corruption, or "corrupt" behaviour involves the violation of established rules or personal gain and profit (Sen, 1999:275). Corruption is “efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means-private gain at public expense or misuse of public power for private benefit” (Lipset, et al, 2000:112-114). This definition is in agreement with Nye (1967:419), who argues that corruption involves behaviour, which deviates from normal duties; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private regarding influence. That is why Bayley (1966:720), sees corruption as being tied particularly to the act of bribery as a general term concerning the misuse of authority as a result of consideration of personal gain, which need not to be monetary. The Asian Development Bank
understood corruption as involving the behaviour on the part of the official in the public or private sector, in which they improperly or unlawfully enrich themselves or those closely related to them or induce others to do so by misusing the position in which they are placed.

But in a somewhat broader perspective the World Bank defines corruption as the abuse of public office for private gain; when an official accepts, solicits or extorts a bribe. It is also abuse when private agent actively offers bribe to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantages and profit. Public office can also be abused for personal benefit even if no bribery occurs, through patronage and nepotism, the theft of state assets or the diversion of state resources. On the other hand, Osoba (1999), add that corruption is an anti-social behaviour conferring improper benefit contrary to legal or moral norms, and which undermines the authorities to improve the living condition of the people. Onigb Otitie, describes corruption as the perversion of integrity or state of affairs through bribery, favour or moral depravity. He went further to state that, corruption takes place “when at least two parties have interacted to change the structure or processes of society or the behaviour of functionaries in order to produce dishonest, unfaithful or defiled solutions”.

Corruption is not alien to Nigeria, it is usual unacceptable in the country. The recent development in Nigeria where discovery of stolen public funds run into billions of US Dollars verifies corruption as a norms in the Nigerian society. Corruption is therefore, the main means to accumulate quick wealth in Nigeria. Corruption as stated earlier occurs in many forms and it has contributed immensely to the poverty and misery of a large segment of Nigeria. In Africa, many people see corruption as a practical problem which involves the “outright theft, embezzlement of funds or other appropriation of state property, nepotism and granting of favours to personal acquaintances, and the abuse of public authority and position to exert payments and privileges (Harsch, 1993:33). That is why Klaveren (1990:26) believes that a corrupt bureaucrat regards his office as a business from which he is able to extract legal-income. As a result, the civil servant’s total compensation “does not depend on the ethical evaluation of his usefulness for the common good but precisely upon the market situation and his talents for funding the points of maximum gain on public demand curve”. Above all, as part of his definition, Leff (1964:8) includes “bribery to obtaining of foreign exchange, import, export, investment or production licenses or avoid paying taxes. According to Odunuga, there are two broad areas where corruption thrives-the bureaucracy and the private sector. It also has to be recognized that there can be political, judicial as well as economic corruption, though they are all closely linked with bureaucratic corruption. But for our purpose, concentration will be on the bureaucratic and private sector corruption, because both adversely impact on economic development. It has to be admitted though, that focus is usually more on the bureaucratic corruption. But if, as Oloponia has stated we take cognizance of Khan’s definition that:

Corruption is an act, which deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of private motive such as wealth, power or status, then corruption can be analysed within the paradigm of political economy.

Oloponia, (cited in Odunuga, 2002), believes that the origin of corruption is located in the political and economic arrangements, which govern the organization of society. What obtains in the public sector also obtains in the private sector. The difference is that bureaucrats serve the state, while private employees are constrained to enterprises that are not much exposed to public glare.

(b) Concept of Development

Development is one of the concepts in social science that has been abused. It generated a great deal of controversy among development theorists and has been a contentious issue. Thus, Oni and Bello (1987), see development as “a continuous process of positive change in the quality and span of life of a person or groups of persons”. The authors identified indicators of development, which inter-alia include (a) ability to feed, cloth and shelter oneself resulting from more income from one’s occupation, provision of infrastructural facilities like roads, water, electricity and improvement in other means of production, (b) ability to live much longer as a result of provision of health and medical facilities, prevention of diseases through better sanitation and other preventive measures, (c) ability to read, write and to understand forces surrounding one provision of formal and informal education (d) ability to participate meaningfully in political activities and in policy making at
governmental level. Development, argues Ofuebe (1998), is nothing to be bequeathed by one people to others. Rather, the process has been manifested in the existence of all people from the earliest of time, as they have generally made attempts; as Rodney (1972), puts it:

to increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment is dependent on the extent to which they understand the law of nature (science), on the extent they put that understanding into practice by devising tools (technology), and on the manner in which work is organized.

Nnoli (1981), perceives development as:

a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and society interact with their physical, biological, and inter-human environments transforming them for their own betterment and that of humanity at large and being transferred in the process. The lessons learned and experiences acquired in this process are passed on to future generations, enabling them to improve their capacities to make further valuable changes in their inter-human relations and their ability to transform nature.

The contention of Nnoli is that development is associated with changes in man and his creative energies and not in things. This means that development is human-oriented and human-generated. In other words, it is a continuous improvement in the capacity of the individual and society to control and manipulate the forces of nature. Todaro (1977), sees development as a multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of absolute poverty. While Seers (1969), perceived the meaning of development on three basic interrogations. According to him, the question to ask about a country's development are "what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all these have declined, then beyond doubt, this has been a period of development, for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been getting worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call that result development even if per capita income doubled and existence of material artifacts in that country. Drawing from the above background, it is pertinent to inquire with a question if development is synonymous with growth or if development encapsulate growth? To address this, two schools of thought on development need to be examined.

(a) The Modernization School of Thought

The modernization genre is often associated with orthodox scholars mostly of Euro-American origin. They include scholars like W.W Rostow, Leibenstein, McClelland, Hoselitz, Arthur Lewis and Wilbert Moore, among others. This schools looks at development from an evolutionary and diffusionist perspective. Its protagonists argue that all societies must assume a polymorphous or unilinear posture to development and that development means transplanting certain western institutions, values, ideas and beliefs from the advanced capitalist countries to the developing areas.

However, a critical examination of this view reveals that this perception of development does not only suffer a poverty of authenticity, it is also eurocentrically overloaded because it sees development as being synonymous with westernization. Similarly, in his critique of the modernization theories of development, Offiong (1980) cites Wilbert Moore's definition of development as the process whereby societies or social institutions change or move from traditional or less-developed ones to those that characterized the developed ones (Offiong, 1980:120). Admittedly, the modernization theorists use the level of industrialization, which is not the structural condition for development but its symptom as well as increases in the Gross National Product (GNP) or per capita income as yardsticks for measuring development (Social Science Review, 1984:14). In this case, they equate economic growth with development.

It was remarkably against this background that prompted Thirlwall (1978) to opine that: figures of per capita income are frequently used as an index of development for making a distinction between developed and developing countries... there are a number of reasons why great care must be taken in using per capita income figures as a criterion of development.
Responding to similar notions of development, Ake (1999, 1981), have seriously warned that insofar as the Third World countries accept the western ideas of development, they subordinate themselves to the West. Insofar as they are made to desire those things which the West passes off as the necessity of development and whose supply, the West largely controls, they put themselves under the power of the west. He also argues that the western notion of development does not encourage attention to revolutionizing the existing social relations of production as a likely or even possible stimulant to development. Bearing in mind the various criticisms of the modernization notion of development, suffice it to say that such definition of development especially in respects of increases in per capita income has outlived its relevance as criterion for measuring development. This is validation of the fact that most developing countries in spite of achieving steady increases in per capita income have continued to witness worsening existential conditions of living among their citizens. A vivid case in point include countries like Nigeria, Liberia and Zambia, among others. This problem, however, constitutes the point of departure for the dependency school of thought.

(b) The Dependency School of Thought

The dependency genre has its origin in Latin America. It emerged as a theoretical counter-discourse to challenge the postulations, prescriptions and positions of the modernization theorists with regard to underdevelopment as well as the process of development in developing countries. Scholars who embrace this school include Andre Gunder Frank, Gerald Meir, Paul Baran, Samir Amin and Claude Ake, among others. They are generally referred to as “dependentistas”. This school adopts the “growth with distribution” approach to development. Under this approach, development is seen as an increase in output (economic growth) accompanied by structural changes in society. In other words, a country is said to be experiencing development if its economic growth (i.e. increases in output of goods and services) is accompanied by the following structural changes:

(a) A reduction in the level of unemployment;
(b) A reduction in the extent of personal and regional inequalities;
(c) A reduction in the level of absolute poverty (absolute poverty refers to a situation in which a person has so small amount of resources that he is unable to meet his basic needs of food, shelter and clothing);
(d) Improvement in literacy, health services, housing conditions and government services;
(e) Improvement in the level of social and political consciousness of the people;
(f) Greater ability to draw on local resources i.e. becoming self-reliant and,
(g) The development of indigenous technological capability (Onyeiwu, 1988:10).

There is also what has become known as the basic need approach to development. In the development circles, therefore, the provision of health services, education, housing, sanitation, water supply and adequate nutrition has come to be known as the basic need approach to development. The rationale of the approach is that the direct provision of such goods and services is likely to relieve absolute poverty more immediately than alternative strategies which simply attempt to accelerate growth or which rely on raising the incomes and the productivity of the poor. Arguments used in support of this approach are that growth strategies usually fail to benefit these intended; the productivity and incomes of the poor depend in the first place on the direct provision of health and education facilities; it may take a long time to increase the income of the poor so that they can afford basic needs; in any case, the poor tend not to spend their income wisely and certain facilities such as water supply and sanitation can only be provided publicly; lastly, it is difficult to help all the poor in a uniform way in the absence of the provision of basic needs.

Under this approach, therefore, development is said to have occurred when there has been an improvement in basic needs, when economic progress has contributed to a greater sense of self-esteem for the country and individuals within it and when material advancement has expanded the range of choice for individuals. Consequently, considering the various articulations of development, a leading scholar in development studies, Gerald Meir (1976), defined development as the process whereby the real per capita income of a country increases over a long period of time subject to the stipulations that the number below an absolute poverty line does not increase and that the distribution of income does not become more unequal. Furthermore, for the purpose what may be described as 'definitional convenience', one other scholar who has attempted an explicit definition of development
is Olugbemi (1987:48), cited in Kalagbor (2004), when he opined that development far from being wealth or output or income is simply the case or increase in the case with which we transverse distance (transport and communication); control diseases, discomfort and disaster; control heat, cold, hunger and thirst; defined self and property, do administration of people and things and reduce physical labour or toil. From what ideological vintage point the concept of development is looked at, the fact that development has social, economic and political dimensions cannot be overemphasized.

Economic development concentrates primarily on economic growth reflected by the increase in gross domestic product, industrialization, capital formation, welfare services and the development of infrastructure. Social development emphasizes the institutionalization of certain social norms and behaviour patterns as well as the transformation of such structures, values and social attitudes that hinder economic change and social mobility. Political development stresses political stability, increased differentiation and specialization of political structures and increased secularization of political culture. In sum, therefore, it is reiterating the fact that economic growth alone does not constitute development though it forms an integral part of it, otherwise, the popular appellation, “growth without development” or what Ake calls “motion without movement”. Development, therefore, encompasses economic growth provided the level of illiteracy, inequality, rural decay, political apathy and parochialism as well as hunger and starvation, among others, are on the decrease.

Causes of Corruption

There is an age long adage which says “there is no smoke without fire”, which is interpreted here to mean that nothing happen without a cause. Hence, much research has been done to determine the causes of corruption. Accordingly, various factors have been identified as instrumental in enthroning corrupt practices. These include, briefly the notion of political economy, the weak institutions of government, a dysfunctional legal system, a culture of affluent and ostentatious living that expects much from “big men”, extended family pressure, village/ethnic loyalties and competitive ethnicity. Of all, the roots causes of corruption in Africa today, colonialism can be its chief cause and engine of growth. The looting of treasuries, bribes and malfeasance that IMF and the World Bank (prompted by the West) are trying to control today are merely symptoms of the corruption whose foundation was elaborately laid by colonial rule. This foundation was laid on the building blocks of racism, authoritarianism, murder, theft, ethnicity and neglect, which colonialism brought to Africa. Africa suffered great injury at the hands of the colonizers who stole and murdered African identity with the weapon of European Social Darwinism. Europe created the image of Africa during the colonial period as a people without history, which had sunk in barbarism and its humanity stagnant, moving neither forward nor backwards. According to social Darwinism, Africa was a corrupt form of the “refined” humanity, which Europe and the white race represented. Whites were supposed to be on the very top of the evolutionary ladder, while Africans hang precariously between them and the chimpanzee. This was the justification for colonialism, which gave Europe the right to corruptly restructure the boundaries of nation states and the lives of the inhabitants to fit the European idea of how it should be. Feeling self-justified in their hypocrisy the colonialist inflicted barbaric massacres on native peoples in the ironic exercise of pacifying them.

Sir Lord Lugards, who ruled Nigeria, was noted for his brutality in beheading the natives and razing their homes. His policy of ethnic cleansing of the Tiv of Central Nigeria, so horrified the Colonial Office in London, that they sent him a caustic minute in 1906 (Hagher, 2002:28). Thus, Lugard was warned “your government should also abstain from any action which may constitute an aggression or a cause of grievance to native tribes” (Ikime, 1977:176). The divide and rule tactics of the colonial administration set tribe against each other, and today, is one of the remote causes for unending blood-letting among the tribes. Accordingly, Apter (1963), sees African extended family as placing undue significant pressure on civil servant forcing him to engage in corruption and nepotism practices. Hence, bureaucrats are believed to be forced to exploit their public position to generate benefits for themselves, their families and their ethnic or social cleavages. While many other researchers have argued that there appear to be absence of commitment of public service among citizens of many developing countries and that excessive levels of bureaucratic corruption in these economies are related to the lack of devotion to survey the public interest. Mbaku (1994), sees incompetence and inefficiency among civil servants as organizational or institutional issues associated
with bureaucratic corruption. Furthermore, Leys (1965), argues that pervasive and chronic poverty, which is as a result of extremely high levels of material deprivation and severe inequalities in the distribution of resources as an advanced major determinant of organizational corruption.

Other factors are poor reward system and greed; Nigeria’s reward system is, perhaps, the poorest in the world. Nigeria is a society where national priorities are turned upside down; hard work is not rewarded, but rogues are often glorified in Nigeria. As Arthur Schlesigner, said, of America in the 60s, “our (the) trouble (with Nigeria) is not that our capabilities are inadequate. It is that our priorities, which means our values – are wrong” (Howard (ed.) 1982). Peer community and extended family pressures, and ‘polygamous household’ are other reasons (Onalaja & Onalaja, 1997). The influence of extended family system and pressure to meet family obligations are more in less developed societies. Harrison (1985:7), acknowledged that the extended family system “is an effective institution for survival”, but notes that it posses a big “obstacle for development”.

According to Edward Lotterman, bad rules and ‘ineffective taxing system’, which makes it difficult to track down people’s financial activities, breed corruption (Pioneer Press, April 25, 2002). Ineffective taxing system is a serious problem for Nigeria. The society should institute appropriate and effective taxing system where everyone is made to explain his or her sources of income, through end-of-the-year income tax filling. The recent ban on importation of Tokunbo (used car) over five years of manufacture is in our opinion, an example of a bad policy that could breed corruption. If this anti-business ban is not review or discarded completely, it will, as many critics have noted affect the economy, as those making a living in the business will be exposed to poverty, and subsequently, corruption. Businessmen would be forced to bribe the corrupt Custom officials (to allow the cars in), causing the state to lose the needed tax revenue. In addition, the policy will divert business to other neighbouring countries (The Vanguard, June 4, 2002). To tame corruption, the society should try to get rid of regulations that serve little or no purposes.

The lukewarm attitude of those who are supposed to enforce the laws of the land (judges, police officers and public officials) could lead to people engaging in corrupt behaviour, knowing fully well that they would get away with it. Little wonder, the Federal Government in a bid to fight corruption set up such bodies as Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC); it has also strengthened the Code of Conduct Bureau. Surprisingly, not much have been achieved in this direction, as the rate of corruption in the country has become so unprecedented. It is obvious the 47 years after political independence and 8 years into the Presidency Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria is still a country steeped in corruption. It is on this note that Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, the EFCC boss acknowledged that “Nigeria is acknowledged worldwide as a 419 nation” and further lamented this situation when he said “the rate of corruption in Nigeria has reached an alarming proportion, yet no person is in prison today in Nigeria” (The Guardian, 12 September, 2004:17). The institutions charged with stemming the malaise have been largely ineffective because they are corrupt. Nigerians are co-occupiers of a glasshouse who should not throw stones. The Trojan horse known as corruption is galloping ahead of everything else in Nigeria and we are all riding on its back. This is not to say that there are no obvious cases of sanity here and there but there are far and in between Nigerian public space is polluted and occupied by home-grown corrupt people: Corrupt individuals have taken over governments, schools banks, police, courts, judiciary, legislative chambers, the executive, everywhere. The rulers and the ruled are corrupt and corrupt people of all hues rule the waves. There is no place to hide in Nigerian clime (Igbinovia, 2005). Some cultural and institutional factors lead to corruption. For instance, nepotism, and the strength of family values are linked to the feeling of obligations.

Merton (1968), has demonstrated the relationship between culture and His “means-ends schema” implies that corruption is at times a motivated behaviour responding to social pressures to violate the norms, so as to meet the set goals and objectives of a social system. Above all, some other scholars like Jabba (1976) believe that corruption in organizations arises from the existence of defective cultural norms and behaviour. While other researchers believe that corruption in developing societies is related to the clash between traditional and foreign norms that accompany modernization and industrial development. As a result, corruption is seen as an unavoidable consequence of economic modernization and political development. (Alam, 1989). Alam further argues that in majority of the developing societies like Nigeria, individual rights are often subordinate to the rights.
of the groups or social cleavages. As a result, loyalty to the ethnic group is considered more important than individual rights or personal accountability. 

Therefore, in Nigeria like other African societies, these particularistic attachments are quite strong and have been cited as important determinant of bureaucratic or organizational corruption. Individuals who became successful in the public sector or the exchange economy are expected to share benefits with their extended family and their ethnic cleavage. Thus, civil or public servants engage in corrupt activities in an effort to meet personal obligation to members of his family or ethnic group.

Corruption and Development

Corrupt anywhere in the society is a threat to everybody in that society because it thrives on injustice and the granting of unfair advantage to the few corrupt. Corruption encourages the reign of dishonesty, while it verifies and diminishes honesty and the rule of justice. It is in essence the state of degradation of man, from being the most highly developed animal created by God, in his image, and in whose body the spirit of God resides. It is thus, the expression of the fallen nature of man from his divine state to the bestial state. In fact, a major problem confronting development in Nigeria is the effect or impact of corruption. However, many studies have been conducted that show the evils or consequences of corruption. It has taught the Nigeria a dangerous and wrong lesson that it does not pay to be honest, hardworking and law-abiding. Through corrupt means many political office holders acquire wealth and properties in and outside Nigeria; and many display their wealth (which is beyond the means), but the society does not blink. This has made politics a big business in Nigeria, because anything spent to secure a political office is regarded as an investment, which matures immediately one gets into office (The Guardian, July 14, 2002).

Corruption causes a reduction in quality of goods and services available to the public, as some companies could cut corners to increase profit margins. Corruption affects investment, economic growth, and government expenditure choices: it also reduces private investment (Mauro, 1997). Bribery and corruption, the culture of late payment, delays or refusal of payment for services rendered, are according to the Lord Bishop of Guildford, David Peck, scaring away British Investors from Nigeria. He notes that, those who fail to pay companies for services rendered seem to forget that the “life blood of any company is its cash flow”. And rightly points out that “the price of corruption is poverty” (Daily Trust, July 9 2002). Because of the widespread of “petty” and “grand” the international business community regards the whole of Africa as a “sinkhole that swallows their money with little or no return” (Callagh, 1994). With the recent changes in the political economy of East Europe, the attention of the business world has been diverted to this area where they may reap quicker results from their investment.

Regrettably, Nigeria lacks development since independence in 1960, no administration has been declared corruption free. What has been the notable difference is the degree of corruption. Hence, has worn this medal of shame for decades. The First Republic collapsed in early 1966 when the military intervened, ostensibly to stop, among other things, the spate of corruption with which regional and national governments had been associated. According to Major C. Kaduna Nzeogwu:

the aim of the Revolutionary Council is to establish a strong, united and prosperous nation, free from corruption and internal strife. . . . Our enemies are the politicians, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and demand ten percent, those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers or VIPs at least, the tribalists, the nepotists, those that make the country look big for nothing before international circles, those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian calendar back by their words and deeds (Nzeogwu cited in Ademoyega, 1981:87).

Virtually every military administration since then hammered on the issue of corruption and the need to extirpate it from our system. If Nzeogwu’s dream was to rout the ten percenters and make the bureaucrats and the political office holders more transparent and responsive to the needs of the society, that dream died with the failure of his Revolutionary Council to administer the country. Though Nigeria was under military rule for 13 years thereafter, the incidences of corruption increased.
We, therefore, frittered away the golden opportunity for development that would have been yielding revenues today. We even lost the sympathy of nations, which could have helped. Nigeria’s return to democracy in October 1979 was expected to usher in a new era of economic development under Shehu Shagari. Sadly, it collapsed on 31 December, 1983 having been in place for some 51 months. Since politics and economics are intertwined, Nigerian politics had become transformed into a system in which politicians and their protégés or proxies found it difficult to resist the temptation to use the public purse to feather private nests. So bad was the situation that Diamond (1988:67), remarked thus about Shagari’s regime:

the character of political leadership was also a problem. It would have been difficult even for the strongest and most heroic leaders to contain violence and corruption generated by the high structural premium on state power. But President Shagari never put that proposition to a test. A weak leader prone to governing by consensus, he was unable to control the renal tendencies of his party machinery and closet advisers. The meetings of his cabinet and party council became grand bazaars where the resources of the state were put up for auction.

When the regime was overthrown by the military, a completely deprived and exhausted nation was given the reason for the action by one of the coup plotters thus:

You are all living witnesses to the grave economic predicament ... which an inept and corrupt leadership has imposed on our beloved nation – our economy has been hopelessly mismanaged. We have become a debtor and beggar nation. There is an inadequacy of food at reasonable prices. ... Health services are in a shambles as our hospitals are reduced to mere consulting clinics without drugs, water and equipment. Our education system is deteriorating at an alarming rate. Unemployment figures including the graduates have reached embarrassing and unacceptable proportions (Abacha, 1983).

This statement which was a true reflection of the Nigerian society moved many into believing that the military men that moved against the government of the day meant business and that from that moment on Nigerians were to witness dramatic changes in their lives. But these were not to be, the Buhari/Idiagbon administration, which tried to introduce some discipline into our society, lasted barely 20 months. It was overthrown in a coup whose supposedly beneficent leader said he was to lead the country back to democracy (Odunuga, 2002:53). Corruption is dangerous and hampers development; it subverts public trust and cooperation and perpetuates closed politics, preventing the reflection of social change in political institutions. It also brings about social and economic divisions, diverts public resources, and supports the negation of the rule of law (Peter, 2002:10). In addition, corruption is a constraint on education, health-care and poverty alleviation, and a great impediment to the Millennium Development Goal of reducing by half the number of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.

Indeed, according to the Catholic Secretariat Forum, “Corruption is responsible in large measure for the broken promise, the dashed hopes and the shallow dreams that have characterized the existence of Nigerians in the last few decades” (On Corruption, 2002:56). The chairman of Transparency International (TI) confirmed this when he said: “Political elites and their cronies continue to take kickbacks at every opportunity. Hand in glove with corrupt business people they are trapping whole nations in poverty and hampering sustainable development”. Indeed, no aspect of our national life is spared; and Nigerians believe that corruption is the nation’s number one problem hindering the development of the country (Corruption, 2001:101).

Recommendations

Thus far, the paper tried to take a detailed commentary on the spate of corruption in the country. Therefore, recommends the following as to reduce the rate of this global phenomenon.

(a) Educate the citizens on the disastrous effects of corruption. This can make Nigerian understand that the last count of corruption is against the interest of everybody. This is because even those who become very rich consequent upon siphoning public funds are not
safe when their neighbours have no food to eat. Through education, Nigerian could be ethically re-oriented for the betterment of all.

(b) All Nigerians must try to say no to corruption. All laws on corruption must be strictly applied and people who corruptly enriched themselves must be brought to book and justice must be seen to be done.

(c) Corruption must be address holistically enhancing good governance, transparency and accountability. To achieve these, a credible electoral process is a sine-qua-non. If the electoral process is credible and political office holders know that their coming into the office in the first place and then continuance in the office depends on the electorate, corruption will be reduced to the barest minimum.

(d) Government should introduce the social welfare for the aged and unemployed people. Pensions and gratuities are to be paid immediately they fall due.

(e) Above all, religious bodies especially Christians must obey the injunction of the bible on the issue as it appears in Exodus 23:8 “and you shall take no bribe for a bribe blinds the officials and subverts the course of those who are right”.

Conclusion
Corruption diverts scarce public resources into private pockets, literally undermines effective governance, endangers democracy and erodes the social and moral fabric of nations. As it has been noted, the lust for power and corruption (and ‘dash’) as gift is known in Nigeria, is not strictly a Nigerian problem. Corruption is a global phenomenon and manifest in both ‘pretty’ and ‘grand’ forms; will it be possible for Nigeria to effectively tame the scourge of corruption?, since corruption has hampered the growth and development of the nation. The only remedy to this malaise according to Chinua Achebe (1982), is that Nigeria will “cease to be corrupt when corruption made difficult and inconvenient”.

References


