

THE NIGERIAN WORKER AND THE CONCEPT OF TRANSPARENCY

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Abstract

Nigeria is a country richly blessed with natural resources such that it is described as one of the richest developing nations. Available statistics reveal that Nigeria is the seventh oil exporter in the world, sixth largest producer in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and the fifth biggest source of United State's oil imports. This enormous wealth is a good potential for attaining meaningful economic development capable of reducing poverty, unemployment and associated ills. On the contrary, Nigeria has been bedeviled by persistent rise in unemployment and poverty levels while economic growth rate until recently had remained stagnant or even worsened. The poor living conditions of majority of Nigerians as a result of poor performance of aforementioned macroeconomic variables has been largely attributed to replacement of transparency by corruption in the nation's economic activities especially in the management of public funds. This paper has examined the need to entrench transparency into the nation's fabric so as to ensure equitable access to resources by all citizens. It is the opinion of this paper that unless corruption which is the order of the day in Nigeria today is replaced by transparency, it will be difficult to attain the much desired meaningful economic development.

Introduction

Transparency in Nigeria has given way to corruption and financial mismanagement which have become so widespread that the news of an honest and reliable public civil servant has been received with no less shock than that of an arrested armed robber. Until recently, corruption and especially misappropriation/mismanagement of public funds have become the bane of the Nigerian society while transparency remains unheard of. The replacement of transparency by corruption has enabled Individuals, particularly public workers who are in minority to enrich themselves at the expense of the nation's economic development. In the words of Kwanashie (1998:316): a small segment of society through their control of state power simply expropriate to themselves the major part of the nation's wealth, which they -squander. A parasitic ruling class, which is incapable of investing looted resources, consequently undermines the ability of the economy to grow. Through mismanagement, competition and bad government, the country is left in a circle of poverty and deprivation.

Poor economic performance, considerably lower economic growth than the nation's potentials can produce and consequently non-attainment of any meaningful level of economic development have all been largely attributed to corruption and absence transparency especially among public office workers. The fact is that most political and public office holders in Nigeria have always succeeded in expropriating national resources at the expense of the nation's economic development. The Nigerian experience argued Kwanashie (2000), has depicted that public office workers in the country are instruments of exploitation and suppression instead of being instruments of development. This explains why, according to Ali-Akpajiak and Pyke (2003), though the nation possesses the greatest natural resources in sub-Saharan Africa, its poverty incidence is rising at an increasingly fast pace.

Corruption has so overwhelmed the Nigerian economy that low or near absence of transparency has blunted economic activities' efficiency in almost every public sector of the Nigerian economy. It is sad to note that corruption which should be seen as an abomination does not need any theoretical exposition for an ordinary Nigerian to comprehend. Rather, transparency, which should have been part of the nation's unceasing norm, remains a "mystery" yet to be properly understood and accepted by most Nigerians especially public officers. This paper is thus, an expository contribution on transparency with the intension that Nigerian public 'workers who control the greater proportion of the nation's wealth will become more transparent. In doing so, the paper has been divided into six

sections namely; introduction, concept of transparency, dimensions of transparency, the Nigeria:: worker and transparency as well as recommendations and conclusion

The

Concept of Transparency

Transparency is an act of openness to the general public about structures, functions concerning public sector accounts and projections. It involves ready access to reliable, comprehensive, timely and understandable data/information on government activities by all interested parties and/or stakeholders. It can also be said to be a situation where policy objectives, institutions framework, policy decisions and their data/information as well as terms of agencies' accountability are not only made available to the public but that they (the public) are able to access and understand these timely (Aderibigbe, 2000). Owing to the constant outcry that public service delivery is not only poor but deteriorating; the notion of transparency has not only gained popularity in the country but given rise to Transparency In Nigeria (TIN).

Transparency in Nigeria was founded in 1994 principally to mobilize all sectors (private and public) in Nigeria for a crusade against corruption and related ills in the economy. According to Transparency in Nigeria (2002), other objectives include:

1. Ensuring that transparency and accountability become part of our culture. .'
2. Ensuring that all sectors of the Nigerian economy are convinced that corruption:
 - a. is widespread and deadly;
 - b. weakens delivery of public goods and services;
 - c. leads to unstable political, economic and social environments;
 - d. weakens the ability of the civil society to demand and obtain transparent and accountable leadership;
 - e. is never indispensable.
3. Bringing about changes that will create national integrity through:
 - a. enhancing the system that works;
 - b. designing and building with the aid of relevant sectors appropriate mechanism;
 - c. monitoring and evaluating old and new economic structures for continuous impact until there is a complete change; and
 - d. restoring trust, honesty, reliability and dedication to duty in all facets of the Nigerian society.

Dimensions of Transparency

Though transparency is expected to be evident in every dimension of both private and public sectors of an economy, the following areas in the opinion of Okunroumu (2000), are crucial.

1. Government's Policy Intentions and Forecasts

There is the need to provide reliable information on policies the government intends to execute as well as the government's policy forecasts on aggregate basis. The aggregation is to forestall complexities and ambiguities that might be associated with information. .

2. Fiscal Operations

Provision of comprehensive data on activities of government especially fiscal operations activities is an essential dimension of transparency. In essence, there has to be accessible, quantitative and reliable data on an economy's revenue (taxes, fees, fines, .etc), expenditure and borrowings. The fact that most economies have failed to perform up to expectation because of poor fiscal operations remains incontestable. Thus, transparency and accountability in any system can be said to exist only if accessibility to proper fiscal operations information is not limited to a few people.

3. Public Procurement and Employment

An important area of transparency which is often neglected is that of public procurement and employment. If there is transparency in an economy, it will exhibit open public procurement and employment practices. This implies that information on these must be properly kept and made available timely to all stakeholders if desired and not a privileged few.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Transparency entails clarity of roles and responsibilities of all employed workers. This means that the schedules of duties for all workers are clearly defined. In doing so, care must be taken to avoid role conflicts and overlapping as these breed corruption and distort transparent practices.

5. Assets and Liabilities

Data on assets and liabilities must be periodically updated and made, available to the public. If this is not maintained, there will be room for diversion and pilfering thus bringing transparency to question.

6. Freedom to Information

A system whose information is not freely obtained at the minimum possible cost by all cannot be said to be transparent. Thus, in a transparent society, all those who require information regarding any of the society's activities should have freedom to such unconditionally. Freedom to information required can be said to be the live wire of transparency.

It is important to note that in transparency, there are limits to disclosure of information. If increased transparency would undermine the effectiveness of policies for decision making or potentially harmful to the economy, then it may be justifiable not to disclose such information. In order to maintain access to sensitive information in the economy, it may be necessary to safeguard the confidentiality and privacy of certain information. Examples of these are information concerning security agencies and their instruments of operations.

The Nigerian Worker and Transparency

The "Nigerian worker" refers to all employees in the country be they in private or in the public sector. This paper is mainly concerned with the public sector where production and productivity suffer more as corruption has replaced transparency. It is mainly the Nigerian public workers that determine functionality or otherwise of the economy. Thus, for the economy to grow and develop, Nigerian public workers must embrace transparency which has reasonably characterized the private sector. Transparency is seen as a panacea for economic development in Nigeria and thus, if truly embraced and practiced by the Nigerian public worker will turn around the nation's economy as it embodies the following among others (Transparency In Nigeria, 2002; Okunroumu, 2000J: L. **Effectiveness** of Policies

If public workers are transparent, government policies will become more effective. This is because being in possession of relevant information, the public will be able to understand and appreciate goals and instruments of such policies. They will thus be able to contribute to the success of such policies thereby ensuring that they become more effective.

2. Commitments by Authorities

Once there is transparency, those in authorities will make credible commitments to achieve stated policy goals. They will be conscious of the fact that since all relevant information are publicly known; any failure on their part might not be taken kindly. Thus, they will be compelled to employ all available means to achieve stated objectives as no deceitful explanation for non-performance will be accepted by stakeholders.

3. Stakeholders' Expectations

In every economy, all stakeholders have their expectations most of which can only be achieved if there is transparency. In Nigeria, the civil society, politicians and other beneficiaries of public goods and services are all stakeholders. The stakeholders have, varying expectations from public office holders which can only be met in a transparent environment. Without transparency, most of the public office holders will pursue selfish interests at the expense of public interests and most expectations of stakeholders could be dashed thus resulting to hopelessness, increase in level of poverty, etc.

4. Conflict Management

Most conflicts in Nigeria which result to all sorts of crisis and violence are largely due to non-transparent nature of the society. In a transparent society where information is accessible to the public; doubts, suspicions, mistrust and disbeliefs which characterize most crisis will automatically be resolved. If there is transparency, most crisis such as those in the

Niger Delta region, Plateau and other states as well as labour crisis among will be taken care of.

5. Facilitation of Policy Consistency

There is no consistency and continuity in most government policies in Nigeria. Since transparency implies availability of information to the public, policy makers and those who implement policies will be careful in handling government policies. That is to say that there will be high level of consistency and continuity if the society is transparent. This is because instead of policies and projects being changed or abandoned for unjustifiable reasons by political leaders, the public will be the best judge as to whether or not a policy or project should be terminated. In other words, actions of any leadership that fails to maintain consistency and continuity on policies and projects, which are capable of improving the welfare of the general public, are likely to be resisted.

In a nutshell, all Nigerian workers need to be transparent for enhanced productivity. In a transparent environment, nepotism, tribalism, religious and regional sentiments which are inimical to productivity will be grossly minimized and thus enhance economic growth. Most developed countries and some better developing countries have attained their present feat due to some level of transparency. Therefore, a situation where corruption and financial mismanagement continued to characterize public activities in Nigeria until recently when government began to prosecute some corrupt officers is unacceptable because these ills (corruption and financial mismanagement) are serious threats from which the country must be rescued (Anyanwu et al, 1997; Chete and Roberts, 1996). Thus, the Nigerian economy has to be transformed from corruption to transparency through its workers instead of the present situation where the nation's huge fortunes are enjoyed by a few.

Recommendations

In the first place, transparency as regards the enforcement of relevant laws and regulations must be entrenched in every sphere of the nation in order to enhance credibility at all levels of economic activities (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2001). This implies that every economic, social and political organ must put in place functional, adequate and efficient financial control and audit machinery. The audit machinery must be accorded the necessary support to operate in line with statutory guidelines without undue interference.

Since transparency involves unhindered access to public information and data, budget formulation and implementation should incorporate larger segments of the Nigerian society such as civil society particularly the academia and human right activists. This will, argued Anyanwu, et al. (1997) in addition to ensuring transparency, accountability and high sense of fiscal discipline on the part of government officials, generate awareness and commitment on the part of the public.

A way of restoring transparency and accountability in government activities, particularly its procurement processes is by vigorously and honestly pursuing the ongoing reforms of the budgetary process popularly known as the 'Due Process'. The present efforts of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission as well as the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission which are commendable should reinforce and complement the activities of the Due Process and vice versa.

Public enterprises and indeed public workers in Nigeria have performed below expectation with consequences being low economic growth rate and increasing poverty incidence largely as a result of corruption and absence of transparency. Therefore, argued Shah and Schacter (2004), for growth, particularly pro-poor growth programmes to be effective and beneficial to the target group so as to reduce poverty, the various forms of corruption and areas practiced must be identified and dealt with.

Every revised document is aimed at attaining better results. The 2000 revised financial regulations were intended to restore the need to strictly comply with the regulations in the conduct of public funds and resources of government. The revision was prompted by the fact that public funds were (in some cases still being) collected and disbursed illegally by many public service workers without recourse to financial regulations. While writing the preface to this revised document, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria - Chief Olusegun Obasanjo - stressed that, it is mandatory for all public officers to ensure strict compliance with the regulations. If there is strict

compliance with the regulations by all public office holders irrespective of personalities involved, an enabling environment for entrenching transparency would have been created.

Conclusion

Since corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian system, it has become difficult for most Nigerian workers to truly embrace and practice transparency. Despite the fact that lip service is paid to preaching transparency even by the worst corrupt public officers, it remains the most "bitter pill" that Nigerian workers must swallow if the country is to attain any meaningful economic development. Thus, transparency must be taken seriously not only in words but in practice by every Nigerian worker especially those in public service as they have all undertaken to be transparent on assumption of duty. As it is, most Nigerian workers will prefer to fight transparency instead of fighting corruption. It is therefore necessary that all Nigerian workers be made to renew their commitments to service, bearing in mind the objectives of transparency in Nigeria in order to ensure a better Nigeria for all of us and our unborn generations who are legal heirs of our enormous fortunes.

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