

CORRUPTION IN PUBLIC SERVICE: MEASURING THE IMPACT, AND THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

This paper is on measuring the impact of corruption in the Public Service and the way forward. The Public Service which is a very big employer of labour, has been facing a lot of problems in terms of accountability and transparency. Efforts to eradicate these problems pose some challenges to the public service itself. The study seeks to examine the impact of corruption in the public service. The paper made useful recommendations which if duly considered would eradicate corruption in public life. It was concluded that the public service needs honest, dedicated and transparent persons to be able to reach where other prosperous nations are in the world.

Introduction

Corruption no doubt is as old as the world itself. It has always existed in the society in one form or the other. The nature and extent of corruption in Nigeria was fairly limited in the good old days when public administration did not extend to all aspects of life. In the past only a handful of officials who were required to collect taxes and enforce law and order did misuse their discretionary powers in the absence of written laws and rules. But the top officials who were mainly British were not corrupt firstly because they got fat and handsome salaries and emoluments and secondly because they did not remain in touch with the public. Another reason responsible for keeping corruption under check was the restricted circulation of money due to the depressed economy of British-Nigeria.

However, with the dawn of independence and the emergence of welfare states, the activities of the government increased. The officials were assigned new and unfamiliar tasks. This resulted in the emergence of new regulations, controls, quotas, licenses, permits, etc which provided ample opportunities for corruption. Thus, corruption attained its climax, after the attainment of independence.

To be candid, the origin of this global epidemic can be traced back to the late 1960's during the period of oil boom. This unhealthy development has in no small measure affected the public service. Based on this premise that the public service has been infested, the Babangida led military junta (which has also been charged with gross corruption) took a step further to have comprehensive civil service reforms in 1988. In spite of this laudable plan of reforms, the problem of corruption in the public service continues to remain uneradicated. This is evident in the numerous pronouncements of the present Obasanjo led democratic government.

Some surveys carried out have revealed that bureaucratic corruption is a dominant feature of the Nigerian Public Service. At the local government level, Ayo compiled over twelve cases of bureaucratic corruption in four states of Kaduna, Kano, Ogun and Oyo which included all kinds of public servants (Ayo, 1986). At the state level Olowu equally conducted three case studies of bureaucratic corruption in respect of businessmen, politicians and higher civil servants in Lagos State.

These studies revealed that most of the cases of corruption revolved around currency and currency related issues, misuse of government resources, etc. (Olowu, 1992).

Meaning and Types of Corruption

Broadly speaking, corruption is a deliberate, conscious and intentional exploitation of one's position, status or natural resources directly or indirectly for personal gains. This kind of misuse of powers by civil servants is known as ADMINISTRATIVE CORRUPTION. However, corrupt acts of civil servants are of various types e.g. acceptance of bribe, acceptance of gifts, securing of appointments for their sons, daughters and relatives etc. In Nigeria, as well as in most developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, the standard of public morality is very low. In almost all the departments, corrupt practices are quite prevalent. Thus, corruption comprises of extravagant expenditure of public money, offering and receiving speed money for the performance of official duties, getting maximum favour from a political boss, writing remarks in confidential reports of

subordinate officials on grounds of personal relationships, opting to stay at a station of one's own choice by greasing the palm of the concerned bosses, etc. Corruption is not only found among civil servants but also among ministers, commissioners, members of the National Assembly and members of state legislative assembly. In fact, it is a social evil which has to be tackled on all fronts and at all levels.

Causes of Corruption

Corrupt practices constitute a vicious circle and it is difficult to say exactly who is corrupt, the officials who receive bribes or the citizens who offer bribes.

It is a truism that accurate diagnosis of a disease is desirable for its cure. Since this paper aims at identifying the impact of corruption in the public service and consequently on the economy, a cursory look into the causes of corruption in the service shall be done and appropriate recommendations shall be provided. In line with the above. Shellukindo (1992) noted the causes of corruption can be said to arise from a number of sources, viz.

- (i) **Economic Factor:** With the attainment of independence, economic development was the goal of the federal government. Hence, there arose the great need for quotas, permits, licenses, control, etc. This gave rise to black-marketing, smuggling, hoarding and profiteering and a host of other corrupt practices, black money began to exchange hands to win over government officials. Thus, corruption became the order of the day. Economic backwardness and poverty are considered as the major causes of corruption. The anti-social elements put forward the view that poverty, which is the root of many ills, drives many honest persons to dishonesty. It is argued that the present day rising prices have hit all salaried persons, as the cost of living is out of proportion compared with the increase in salaries and emoluments. As a result of this ugly situation, some of the discontented employees are compelled to accept illegal gratification. The problem of population explosion cannot be left out in this discussion. The rapid growth of population has aggravated family problems and thus, the public servants cannot make both ends meet. This precarious situation tempts them to be dishonest,
- (ii) **Sociological Factor:** Corruption is deep-rooted in our acquisitive society where greatness of individuals and nobility of their family is judged by the wealth they possess rather than what they are in true spirit. People acquire wealth without caring for the means they adopt. Even gods are offered sacrifices and bribes for success in daily needs and undertaking. If the gods v themselves were bribed, why not these hungry-looking public servants? Thus, the officials are ever ready to accept bribes and be better placed so as to gain status in the acquisitive society.

Procedural Factor: Administrative procedure in many African countries, particularly in Nigeria is another root cause of corruption. Administrative discretion granted to civil servants provides them great opportunities to indulge in corruption. Red-tape, chronic delays, frequent change of orders, compel the parties concerned to make use of speed money and get things done. The contractors' payment vouchers are held up by the accounts departments, goods are detained at the various customs check points, people are made to wait in long queues at petrol stations, orders for transfer or promotion are passed on the file, but are not communicated to the people concerned. There is delay in sanctioning contracts, these and many more may arise for sheer slackness but this may be created intentionally to cause harassment in order to grab money. Sometimes, the private sources put pressure on the public servants to do certain things which benefit them much. The shrewd businessman is prepared to pay speed money to get his work expedited. In addition to these facts, the official at the verge of retirement shows special favour to businessmen by speeding up their work so as to get jobs in their firms after retirement.

- (iv) **Political Factor:** Olowu equally agrees with the fact that there is corruption in the Nigerian Public Service. He however blames it on the political development of the nation. Developments in the political sphere have reduced the Nigerian public sector to almost a pure forum of institutionalized corruption in the public service. Olowu blames it on two identifiable factors of military intervention into the Nigerian politics and the oil boom. "The advent of

military rule in 1966 and the oil boom of the 1970's increased the temptation for public office holders" (1992) This statement clearly shows that corruption in the public service was brought to its zenith by the coming of the military into government. The emergence of democratic era has not helped matters in this regard. The ministers and commissioners at the federal and state levels, members of National Assembly, Members of State Legislative Assembly, the Local Government Chairmen and Councillors exert undue political pressure on civil servants to get illegal things done. Even judges of lower courts are not free from corruption. Also the judges of high courts may like to dance to the tune of the party in power with an eye on elevation to higher ranks. Evidently, only those dancing to the tune of political bosses alone can expect promotions. This type of corruption has led to a vicious circle of corruption among public servants in Nigeria.

(v) Lack of Morality and National Spirit: People are no more honest because of low morale caused by the high-ups. There is lack of incentive or inducement in the form of promotion in the public service. People possessing chain of degrees and diplomas join government service as middle level staff and retire without being promoted to the rank of higher civil servant's. Due to these drawbacks, they are not interested in discharging their official duties with honesty and devotion. They are forced to accept bribes in order to supplement their meager pay-packets. Thus, lack of morality in the public service has not only created the craze for corruption but also inefficiency in the public service. The politicians and the so-called national leaders of today have created a kind of system in which the feeling of national spirit is no more heard of. There is no trust anymore. The aim of the ruling party is to satisfy the party members who have contributed towards the cost of fighting the elections. When political leaders continue to portray dubious traits like these the feeling which compels a man to come forward and serve his nation sinks into oblivion. The politicians aim at their self-interests and the result of all these is corruption.

(vi) Partiality of Recruitment Agencies: No doubt the Federal and State Civil Service Commissions

are set up under the Nigerian constitution with adequate constitutional safe-guards to be impartial recruiting agencies in the civil service, but this has become a dream. The recruiting agencies are not working in accordance with the true letter and spirit of the constitution. For example, before one gets the job of an administrative/personnel officer, one must bribe with at least fifty thousand naira (1450,000.00). Consequently, because he is recruited in a corrupt process, he is likely to be corrupt throughout his career service.

Measuring the Impact of Corruption

Several reasons account for the assessment of the impact of corruption in Africa. However, Nwoye³ advanced the following reasons:

Firstly, the pervasiveness of corruption in the continent has made it very difficult for researchers to decide which aspect of corruption to study and the research tools to use in the course of the study. Secondly, corruption as a concept is not easy to operationalise because of its multi-disciplinary and subjective nature. Thirdly, the high impact of political dictatorship and frequent conflicts have complicated further any effort to sincerely measure corruption. Besides, many dictatorial regimes can easily hide their selfish tendencies by adopting coercive means and intimidation. This was true of the case of Late General Sani Abacha of Nigeria, Lafe Sese Seko Mobutu of Zaire (Democratic Republic of Congo) Late Siaka Stevens of Sierra Leone, Eyadema of Togo, Omar Bongo of Gabon, Arap Moi of Kenya, Emperor Bokassa of Central African Republic, Hastings Banda of Malawi, Late Marcias Nguema of Equatorial Guinea, etc.

Corruption is a prominent characteristic common to all African Public Services. Commenting on the impact of corruption, Prah stated that there is hardly any African state today, which is not accused of persistent development of unethical and unprofessional habits. According to him, differences exist in the extent to which malpractices have affected the African public services, but however pointed out Nigeria among other nations as most affected. He went further to say that while" in Botswana or Namibia, pervasiveness is limited, in other countries like Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia, Sierra Leone and Sudan, lack of sense of accountability, structurally irresponsible and

unethical behaviours have become the adopted practices in public service Prah (1992). The above statement simply singled out Nigeria among others as the most corrupt nation.

Widespread corruption has negative consequences not only on the economy of Nigeria but also on the political and social aspects of the country. On the political scene, Wamalma remarked that corruption has created a situation of political imbalance by eroding the trust and confidence which are the bedrock of political stability. The leaders preoccupied with serving certain vested interests creates and magnifies divisions within the society and thus subscribes to loss of respect for constituted authority and the law of the land. This situation breeds insecurity among leaders who then resort to several unethical means to perpetuate themselves in power at all cost. In the end, there occurs a change of government (military coup) and the new leader comes out with a promise to get rid of corruption to justify his action in taking over power Wamalma, 1992).

The economy is most affected. It is the most affected aspects of our National Life. There has been corrupt cases of payment of salaries and emoluments to ghost workers, direct embezzlement and gross mismanagement. These cases have dented the image of the Nigerian slate in the eyes of the international community.

Every Nigerian is gripped with the fear that public office holders lack the ability to manage public facilities entrusted to their care (a situation that is occasioned by corrupt tendencies). Most Nigerians have lost confidence in government and the public services. They have come to the conclusion that the government machinery has lived below expectations in the eyes of those it is expected to serve. These fears are real especially when one thinks of the wide gap between expected and actual performance of the public servants. The gap appears so wide that it threatens the corporate existence of the Nigerian state.

The Transparency International (TI) has made several efforts to assess the impact of corruption not only in Africa but also in the entire world. According to Lampe the Transparency International has declared in its charter objective that corruption is one of the greatest challenges of the present world. It undermines good government, basically disorganizes public policy, results in misallocation of human and material resources, harms the private sector and private sector development and particularly hurts the poor section of the society.

Corruption has now been identified as a disease of all races, all cultures and all social and political system and that corrupt persons are now found among members of all economic groups (Lampe, 1998).

A major strategy of the Transparency International (TI) is the collection and analysis of data regarding the damaging effect of corruption in many countries of the world. The Transparency International uses the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) in determining the extent of corruption in all countries. The CPI measures the extent of corruption on a scale of 10.0 to 1.0. The score 10.0 indicates that a nation is perceived to be totally free from corruption while the score of 1.0 indicates that a nation is perceived to be totally corrupt. The 1998 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) includes data for 85 countries. Table one below shows the following nations with excellent scores: Denmark 10.0, Finland 9.6, Sweden 9.5, New Zealand 9.4, Iceland 9.3, Canada 9.2, Singapore 9.1, Netherlands 9.0 and Norway 9.0. The above is a clear manifestation that most of the Scandinavian countries are corruption-free. This might be evident of their long history of transparency and accountability in leadership and coupled with their belief in securing maximum welfare for the greatest number of their citizens. The above data is presented in table one below.

Table One: Impact of Corruption (Best Countries)

No	Country	Corruption Perception Index
1.	Denmark	10.0
2.	Finland	9.6
3.	Sweden	9.5
4.	New Zealand	9.4
5.	Iceland	9.3
6.	Canada	9.2

Source: Transparency International, The Guardian on Sunday, October 25 1998 p. 25.

Table Two: Impact of Corruption (Worst Countries)

7.	Singapore	9.1
8.	Netherlands	9.0
9.	Norway	9.0

No	Country	Corruption Perception Index
1.	Cameroon	1.4
2.	Paraguay	1.5
3.	Honduras	1.7
4.	Tanzania	1.9
5.	Nigeria	1.9
6. ,,	Indonesia	2.0
7.	Colombia	2.2
8.	Venezuela	2.3
9.	Ecuador	2.3
10.	Russia	2.4

In Measuring the impact of corruption, a London-based group known as the Emerging Market Investor (EMI) made some frantic efforts to examine and evaluate corruption (EMI, 1999). The group carried out an extensive survey in respect of transparency profile of twenty-five emerging market economies which included Nigeria. The survey revealed that Nigeria and Russia had the lowest rating as shown on Table 3 below. This revelation is not too good for a country that is trying to embrace democratic governance after so many years of military dictatorship. According to the survey, the countries were rated in six major areas securing a maximum of ten points in each category, and when added together give a sum total of sixty points. The areas of rating included: fiscal and monetary policies; banking practices; corrupt practices; accounting practices; custody and settlement practices. The study group administered questionnaires to countries concerned. Based on the responses the table below emerged.

With a total of 8 points out of 60, Nigeria remained at the bottom of the 25 countries. Vietnam, China and Venezuela are other countries with low points.

The foregoing discussion is presented in Table 3 below.

Table Three: EMI: Transparency Rating of Major Emerging Markets

Rating	Country	FP	MP	BP	CP	AP	C&SP	Total
1.	Hong kong	9	7	7	8	8	8	47
2.	Israel	8	8	7	7	7	9	46
3.	Singapore	5	8	9	9	6	9	46
4.	Czech. Rep.	9	9	6	5	8	7	44
5.	South Africa	7	9	8	5	7	7	43
6.	Argentina	8	9	8	3	6	5	39
7.	Poland	8	9	6	5	6	5	39
8.	Chile	4	8	9	7	5	5	38
9.	Peru	9	8	5	5	7	4	38
10.	Hungary	8	9	5	6	5	5	38
11.	Turkey	7	7	4	3	6	7	34
12.	Thailand	9	7	2	3	6	6	33
13.	South Korea	5	8	3	4	4	8	32
14.	Philippines	7	8	4	3	4	4	30
15.	Mexico	7	7	2	3	4	6	29
16.	Brazil	3	5	6	4	5	5	28
17.	India	5	6	4	3	3	4	25
18.	Malaysia	4	6	3	5	5	2	25

19.	Egypt	1	1	4	3	8	4	21
20.	Indonesia	4	6	1	2	4	1	18
21.	Venezuela	2	2	4	2	4	4	18
22.	China	1	1	1	4	5	4	16
23.	Vietnam	1	1	1	3	2	1	9
24.	Nigeria	1	1	1	2	2	1	8
25.	Russia	1	1	1	2	2	1	8

FP Fiscal

Policy. MP -

Monetary Policy. B.P -

C.P - **Corrupt** Practices.

AP - Accounting Practices.

C & SP - Custody and Settlement Practices.

Source: Emerging Market Investor (EMI) December 1999.

Widespread corruption has negative impact on both the economic, social and political aspects of a country. Corruption erodes trust and confidence which are the bedrock of political stability. The leaders who emerge to serve certain vested interests create dichotomy within the society and as such yield to loss of respect for constituted authority and the law of the country. This situation gives rise to insecurity among leaders who then fall back to extra-constitutional means to remain in power at all costs. The resultant consequence is a change of government (military coup) and the new leader comes with a pledge to eradicate corruption so as to justify their coup action.

The economy is worse hit. There has been corrupt cases of payment of wages/salaries and emoluments to ghost-workers, deliberate embezzlement and gross mismanagement. The above cases have always dented the image of the affected country before the international community.

The citizens of these low rated countries are gripped with the fear that public office holders lack the ability to manage public facilities entrusted to their care (a situation that is occasioned by corrupt tendencies). Most of these citizens have lost confidence in public services. They conclude that the government machinery has fallen below expectation. It has been argued that these fears are real especially when one considers the wide gap between expectation and actual performance of public services. This gap is so wide that it threatens the corporate existence of the affected countries.

The Way Forward

Corruption has now become a well-organized affair. To fight against this virus, there has to be a deadly attack on it. This deadly attack requires both long and short -term measures.

The greatest antidote in search of solution to the problem of corruption is sound education. The people need to be educated before comprehending any form of control on corruption. People need to know their legitimate rights and duties.

Public administrators should not be given too much discretionary powers. The corrupt officials should be brought to book.

To eradicate corruption among members of state legislative assemblies and National Assembly, a strong public opinion, strong opposition parties, a free press and if possible the system of recall can be adopted to check corrupt legislators.

In democratic countries, the twin requirements of devising adequate means of ensuring that all citizens have within their reach a fairly independent and impartial agency to have their more important grievances *visa-avis* the government inquired into and redressed and the desirability of providing the legislature with adequate means of discharging their functions as guardians of the people's rights and privileges effectively are not only important but basic and indispensable.

The institution of 'Ombudsman' called Public Complaints Commission in Nigeria should be strengthened to deal ruthlessly with mal-practices and corruption among public servants. This institution should be completely independent of both the executive and judiciary so as to be able to build a tradition of strong and impartial criticism of government administration on the one hand, and of helpfulness of the citizens in their dealings with the administration on the other. If this is achieved,

justice will be better served and efficient and humane administration will be promoted. Such remedies as suggested above can hardly cure the malady of corruption. They look mechanical in approach. Till the pattern of life changes, corruption cannot be eradicated. Acquisition of private property should cease to be the symbol of status and power. The present acquisitive society should be replaced by socialistic pattern of society, standing for equitable distribution of wealth and income, justice and fairness. Better conditions of service can help to eradicate corruption among civil servants. It is the patriotic duty of the civil servants and all of us to campaign against corruption in our midst. Every public servant should feel that his action should be above board and he should be able to stand the closest scrutiny at any time. It is also essential for him to see and watch that his organization makes it difficult for his staff to indulge in malpractices.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is realized that no nation can make any meaningful progress under a corrupt public service. This realization has occasioned a global re-awakening of interest on how to eradicate all manners of unethical and corrupt practices in the public service.

In the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, the growth of their economy lies in the hands of the public servants. It therefore becomes crystal clear that corruption must be eradicated from their public services for the survival and growth of the economy. Corruption has dented the image of these countries both at home and abroad. Besides, it has eaten into the very fabric of the society and has slowed down their development. It should be the patriotic duty of all public office holders and all of us to shun corrupt practices. Every public servant should join the crusade against corruption. We must be above board in all our dealings and be able to stand the closest scrutiny at any time.

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