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Department of Sociology,
Bayero University, Kano-Nigeria

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Combating Corruption in Nigerian Society: A Collective Responsibility

Mageed Oshogwe Haruna & Misbahu Ibrahim Zamsara

Abstract
Corruption as lack of integrity or dishonesty has no boundary and its prevalence varies from one country to another. However, the problem of corruption in Nigerian society is severe. It cuts across all the spheres of the country’s national life. Thus, it is widespread. This review analyses the factors responsible for widespread corruption in the country. It also examines the means of combating it. The review relies on data derived from secondary sources. The review establishes that the causes of the prevalence of corruption in Nigerian society are multidimensional in nature. They range from the structure and culture of Nigerian society to lack of leadership will and greedy, etc. The consequences of corrupt practices threaten the developmental agenda of any government. Corruption has cost the country severe losses, economically, socially and politically. This review therefore, offers, among others, the following remedies to effectively combat corruption in the country. Thus, there is a need for strong political will among the political leadership by ensuring continuity and doggedness in the fight against corruption in the country. Foreign nations, such as European, Americans and the like, as a matter of fact, must sincerely be committed and support the Nigerian government in the fight against corruption and should be ready to cooperate with the government in locating the looted funds and subsequently and unconditionally refund to the country. They should, henceforth, stop in providing a safe haven for the looted funds. Only corrupt-free individuals who have made their wealth and success through legitimate means should be given national honours, honorary doctorate degree and traditional titles.

Keywords: Combating Corruption, Corruption, Collective Responsibility, Nigerian Society

Introduction
Corruption as lack of integrity or dishonesty has no boundary and its prevalence varies from one country to another. Many developing countries, like Nigeria are bedevilled with corrupt practices. Consequences of corruption are inimical to the progress and development of every society, including Nigeria; as it impedes the socio-economic and other spheres of national life and also contributes to poverty and poor infrastructural development (Nageri, et al., 2013). Although Nigeria is blessed with both human and natural resources necessary for development and progress, its citizens are still languishing in poverty due to corruption in both public and private realms. Corruption, therefore, is hostile to progress in Nigeria. It amplifies insecurity and poses a serious threat to socio-economic development and democratic process of Nigerian society (Alemika, 2012); it eludes good governance and accountability, which are critical in ensuring effective collaboration, peaceful coexistence and progressive process of democratic culture and socialization (Mohammed, 2013); it is a major social problem that hinders Nigeria’s development desires that need to be combated (Radda, 2012).

Efforts and campaigns to combat corruption are supposed to be done collectively through the leadership will, and the cooperation with support from the citizens. Nigerian leaders have in the past attempted to stem the tide of corruption in the society by making policies and setting up anticorruption agencies, such as the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related offences Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and financial Crime Commission (EFCC).
These efforts have not yielded the desired result, as the trend has been on the increase, thereby pervading every facet of the country’s national life, especially through looting of public funds with impunity. Yakubu (2009) holds that, in order to effectively combat corruption, a society and its governments as well as the citizenry must stand up against the act by exposing the corrupt and making them to face the appropriate laws and prosecute the offenders, irrespective of their individual status, political, ethnic and other affiliations.

Corrupt practices cut across democratic and military administration but the tendencies of the public office holders to engage in the act is more pervasive during the civil rule (Aluaigba, 2009), which the military have claimed for their intervention in Nigeria political process. However, the present democratic government, under the leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari promised to be committed in combating corruption as a laudable step for a progressive change. This requires the efforts of stake holders (individuals or groups) for its success and sustainability. The focus of this paper centres on combating corruption in Nigeria by seeking answers to some of these questions, thus: does government alone be able to combat corruption? What are the responsibilities of individuals and groups on that issue? What are the suitable ways to combat corruption in Nigeria?

Corruption as a Concept
The concept ‘corruption’ varies among scholars as the practice. Thus, corruption is “a behaviour that deviates from an established norm for selfish gain and profit” (Dukku, 2012:226). It is a misuse or improper use of power and influence, deliberately and consciously for self-interest, as against the interest of the general public (Anazodo, et al., 2013). The World Bank (1998) affirms that corruption is the use of public office for private gain. Ofoeyeze (2004:20) cited in Anazodo (2013: 127) describes corruption as:

Any action or inaction of any person or group (public or private) deliberately perpetuated 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.

This implies that corruption is a deviant and criminal behaviour as such requires sanctions, as it violates the norms and values as well as the regulations guiding the conducts of individuals and groups in a society. Corruption is a crime against humanity. Corruption is not restricted to public officials, as it also occurs in private business, politics, religious organizations and educational institutions whereby employees use their official capacity to extort or embezzle fund for their selfish end. Rose-Ackerman (1999) asserts that corruption is a symptom that something has gone wrong in the management of a society and the institution designed to govern the interrelationships between the members and the state are used for selfish interest.

According to Dambazau (2007), corruption does not only encourage criminal behaviour but takes varieties of forms. Thus, it is a commission or an omission of acts not in accordance with the norms and standing rules laid down for a particular position one occupies. Haruna (2013:5) connotes that “corruption takes the form of giving or taking bribe, receiving undue financial or material rewards and embezzlement of public funds.” Thus, he maintains that corruption is a social syndrome that affects social relationship. It has eroded efficiency and professionalism of patriotic services of the citizenry to the Nigerian society (Odeh, 2008).
Nature and Extent of Corruption in Nigerian Society

Corruption in Nigerian society is insidious and has grown enormously in variety and magnitude. Achebe (1983) observes that corruption in Nigeria ranges from budgeting abuses, political patronage, public funds being doled out to political associates and personal friends, collection of mobilization fee or full payment without executing the contract, rewarding politicians who failed elections with ministerial appointment, re-assigning ministers, commissioners or council members who are involved in scandals to another Ministry or Department, which Dambazau (2007) describes as bribery, undue gratification, fraud and embezzlement. Ngwu and Okoli (2013:98) have highlighted that the most common features of corruption are:

- Giving and receiving bribes,
- Inflation of contracts,
- Kickback and payment upfront,
- Abuse of public property,
- Lodging government fund in private accounts,
- Examination malpractices,
- Adulterated food or hazardous drugs,
- Misappropriation,
- And embezzlement of fund,
- Money laundry by public officers and using proxy names to buy property.

It is manifested in tax evasions, poor road constructions, examination malpractices and leakage, substandard production and supply of goods, nepotism (Ene, et al., 2013). The consequences of that include death-traps for road users, and an increased rate of insurgencies and other criminal behaviours which had claimed many lives and properties in the country. The rudiment of corruption appears in many ways. For instance, it appears when entrepreneurs refuse to declare their profits in order to evade government levy. It also appears when petroleum products are being diverted for selfish interest. Corruption can be seen when a teacher or lecturer in an institution of learning demands some money, material from students and/or a male teacher demands sex from his female students. It can also be seen when parents or guardians offer gratification (money and materials) to the teachers or lecturers of their children and wards to pass their examinations with better grades. It takes place when politicians award or inflate contracts to their compatriots and compromise standards. It also takes place when a university or traditional institution offers a corrupt leader with honorary doctorate degrees and traditional titles, respectively, despite their dubious sources of wealth.

The pervasive nature of corruption in Nigeria cut across tribes or culture because the citizens encourage corrupt practices such that once a person is appointed into any political office, the expectations from his/her tribal people will be so high in terms of what the office will offer thereby encouraging him/her in selfish interest over that of the public, which he/she sworn to uphold. Thus, the political system and the culture of Nigeria could make the Nigerian leaders and citizens more prone to corrupt practices. Therefore, a corrupt social system or milieu tends to produce individuals with the whole idea of get-rich-quick in dubious means, thereby enhancing criminal behaviour (Dambazau, 2007). Achebe (1983:38) maintains that "Nigerians are corrupt because the system under which they live today makes corruption easy and profitable; they will cease to be corrupt when corruption is made difficult and inconvenient."

Corruption in Nigeria is pervasive. It is found more especially in the government institutions; the Executive Arm, the Legislative Arm (the Senate, House of Representatives), the Judiciary (Courts, Tribunals; Lawyers), Uniformed Institutions (Military, Police, Road Safety Corps) and bureaucracy. Thus, various past and present Nigerian leaders under
different administrations have been indicted for being enormously corrupt (Mohammed, 2013; Anazodo, et al., 2012 and Ademola, 2011). This does not exonerates the followers from corruption because; they encourage their leaders to be corrupt by making demands that they cannot ordinary fulfill. Therefore, combating corruption in Nigerian society lies in the leadership will with concomitant understanding, support and cooperation of the citizenry.

Causes of Corruption

Corruption is a multifaceted phenomenon. Thus, Ngwube and Okoli (2013) assert that many reasons have been put forward as probable causes for the prevalence of corruption in Nigerian society. They include non-conformity to religious principles, imparted values and ideas alien to our culture, ethnicity which encourages favouritism and nepotism and a weak legal system which is honoured in the breech than observance.

Ijewere and Dunmade (2014) argue that the root cause of corruption in Nigeria could be traced to the culture and weird value system of the society. The social pressure which a society exerts on some of its members is one of the causes of corruption in Nigeria. This is because those members under the societal pressure are conditioned to engage in deviant/criminal behaviour among which is corruption (Merton, 1957). The influence or pressure of polygamous household or extended family system, and obligations to meet the family needs in Nigeria, can be attributed to why public servants involve themselves in corrupt practices. Family pressure is heightened on its member because there is no social security set up by Nigerian government for the unemployed people. Corruption is linked to the strong family values involving intense feelings of obligation. A society that has her citizens who are achievement oriented, but have relatively low access to economic opportunities will face family pressure (Aleyomi, 2013 and Merton, 1957). Also, any society whose culture stresses economic success as an important goal but nevertheless strongly restricts access to opportunities will have higher levels of corruption and other deviant behaviour (Lipset and Lenz, 2000). Nigerian society stresses economic success and many people, therefore, achieve economic success through corrupt practices.

Ene, et al. (2013) observe that the Nigerian society encourages corruption on the one hand, just as they frown at it on the other. This is because those who are known for corrupt practices are being celebrated with traditional titles and honorary doctorate degrees and special prayers and positions in religious organizations are offered to those people who made their wealth through dubious means.

A latent cause of leadership corruption occurs heavily as a result of greed by the leaders, spoil system, selfishness, etc. (Anazodo, et al., 2012). Another cause of corruption in Nigeria could be traced to the external factor. Thus, foreign nations, on the one hand, tend to provide a safe haven for the looted funds of the corrupt, while on the other hand, they tend to condemn the act thereafter. Ene, et al. (2013) maintain that external influence from the European, North American nations and the like, encourage corruption in African countries including Nigeria, as they provide a safe haven for the stolen funds.

Theoretical Framework

This paper uses anomie theory in order to explain and discuss corruption in Nigeria. The anomie theory perceives corruption as originating from the social structure of the society, which exercises a definite pressure upon certain citizens to engage in deviant or criminal
behaviour, such as corruption. According to Merton (1957), any society that placed strong emphasis on goals without a concomitant means of achieving them, will inescapably lead to “anomie”. Anomic refers to lawlessness; a prevalence of non-conformity to the norms or laid down laws of a particular society at a given period.

In every society, there are societal accepted goals and means of achievement of such goals. However, according to Anazodo, et al. (2012), when the societal means fail to match the goals, vice-versa, of certain members, they become socially disorganized and engaged in deviant or criminal behaviour, such as corruption. In Nigeria today, emphasis is placed on wealth acquisition and many people are no longer interested in the legitimate means. The discrepancy between the wealth and ways of attainment in the society invariably lead to various forms of corrupt practices, such as embezzlement of public funds, offering and acceptance of bribe, examination malpractices, electoral rigging, which impede the development of Nigeria in all spheres.

**Consequences of Corruption**

Odeh (2008:137) asserts that “corruption has eroded efficiency and professionalism of patriotic services to the Nigerian federation.” Ijewere and Dunmade (2014) argue that corruption is used to acquire and sustain political mandate in Nigeria, leading to grievous consequences of mass poverty, unemployment and insecurity. They maintain that corruption in the public sector usually encompasses abuses by government officials, such as embezzlement, nepotism and cronyism. They also highlight other abuses, which include over-inflation of contracts, leading to kickback on contracts; and abuses linking public and private actors, such as bribery, extortion, influence peddling, payment for favourable judicial decisions, falsification of financial records and fraud, to mention but a few. Ijewere and Dunmade (2014) maintain that corruption threatens fair business practices, security, democratic process, good governance and sustainable development. It derails administrative goals, instigates organizational goals displacement and it drastically reduces the image of Nigeria in the international communities. Adebayo (2013) establishes that corruption remains the biggest barrier to ending extreme poverty and stands in the way of progress in the development of all areas including preventing funds reaching healthcare and education, limiting individuals’ abilities to access jobs and social benefits, corroding systems of law and stopping aid working effectively in the poorest parts of the world.

Corruption has taught Nigerians wrong lessons that it does not pay to be honest, hardworking and law-abiding, because the culture has legalized illegality of corrupt practices in the Nigerian society (Aleyomi, 2013). The struggle for survival in the Nigerian society has become a race for everyone without any regards for morality. Thus, Dambazau (2007) affirms that corruption influences criminal behaviour. According to him, it is one major crime that has a strong impact on national security, as it helps in distorting the role of law and undermining the institutional foundation for socio-economic growth. This is so because corruption shuns away foreign investors. Corruption makes it difficult for government to pay workers’ salaries and allowance promptly, provide infrastructural social facilities, which are aimed at improving the living standard of citizenry thereby reducing poverty which is pervasive and dehumanizing in Nigeria today. Corruption is a mosaic which must be collectively surmounted.
Recommendations on the Ways of Combating Corruption in Nigerian Society

Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations are proffered with the hope that, if implemented, they may help in combating the problem of corruption in Nigerian society:

1. Since there is a strong political will as so far demonstrated by the new political leadership of President Muhammadu Buhari to fight against corruption in the country, there is need for support and cooperation of all and sundry, including government and non-governmental organizations, religious and community-based associations and members of the public to effectively fight against corruption in Nigeria. Thus, the government should be sincere and committed in the fight against corruption without fear or favor irrespective of the individuals or parties involved.

2. Foreign nations, such as European, Americans and the like, as a matter of fact, must sincerely be committed and support the present Nigerian government in the fight against corruption and should be ready to cooperate with the government in locating the looted funds and subsequently as well as unconditionally refund to the country. They should, henceforth, stop in providing a safe haven for looted funds.

3. Corruption is a criminal offence. Therefore, corrupt individuals and groups should be properly investigated and those found guilty of the crime should be made to face the laws without fear or favor and the stolen funds or property should be returned and the perpetrators should be jailed to serve as deterrent to other persons who may wish to commit such crime.

4. Only corrupt-free individuals who have made their wealth and success through legitimate means should be given national honors, honorary doctorate degree and traditional titles.

Conclusion
The prevalence of corruption in the Nigerian society shows that the society, its leaders as well as the citizens are not really prepared to effectively tackle the trend. As such the looting of the public treasury continues with impunity, and thereby poses a serious threat to the democracy and progressive change. The current efforts by President Muhammadu Buhari to sincerely curb corruption, therefore, need to be supported by all and sundry. Government and her agencies, groups, associations, non-governmental organizations, community-based associations and members of the public must cooperate and partner with the present government’s mission to effectively fight against corruption in the country.

References


