

Media and its role in curbing corruption in Nigeria

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Abstract

Corruption is considered as the most important factor impeding the socio-economic transformation of developing countries. It is threatening the existence of countries like Nigeria. Every sphere of life is affected by corruption. To counter the menace of corruption, various agencies have played a significant role, one such being the Media-Print or Broadcasting. The fight against corruption is not an easy one but with greater autonomy, media can certainly play a significant role. This will not only lead to trickling down of benefits of development to the masses and enable them to improve their economic position but will also benefit the country by way of improving its economic status at the world level.

Key words: Development and Corruption, forms, causes, effects, role, media, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Corruption is a worldwide phenomenon and there is hardly any society without one form of corruption or the other. Corrupt practices did not begin today; its history is as old as the human race. The destructive impact of corruption in the lives of nations is acknowledged. It is considered the most important factor that is impeding the accelerated socio-economic transformation of developing or less developing countries of the world. Infact, this is very well seen in case of some countries like Nigeria. Scholars like M. Watts have pointed out that “effects of corruption in the Nigerian society cannot be overemphasized” (2008:47). Corruption is indeed a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society. In the year 2000, Transparency International carried out a survey on the corruption levels of 90 countries and it ranked Nigeria as the most corrupt country. In 2001, Nigeria was ranked the second most corrupt nation in the world. This ranking in terms of corruption continued even in 2001, 2002 and 2003. 2004 ranking showed a little improvement when compared to the past four years. Nigeria was ranked the third most corrupt country in the world. In 2005, Nigeria was ranked the 6th most corrupt nation. In 2006, Nigeria was ranked as the 18th most corrupt country in the world. As per the 2007, 2012, 2013 and 2014, the ranking of the country was 32, 37, 33 and 38 respectively in terms of corruption in the world (see, <http://hubpages.com/education/Corruption-in-Nigeria>). It is one of the most important factor which is responsible for the economic woes of the country. Scholars like Akpeninor (2007:116) has pointed out that even when the state government’s revenue has been increasing geometrically since June 1999, it has actually not positively impacted the lives of Nigerians nor provided the much needed infrastructural development. He cited a survey carried out by the United Nations Development Programme which shows that “impoverishment of Nigeria has vastly increased proportionately as revenue collected by the governors also

immensely increased” (2007:116). Corruption therefore is threatening the existence of Nigeria as an entity. Nearly every sphere of human endeavor is affected by corruption and no profession is spared either.

It therefore becomes pertinent to counter the menace of corruption. Of the various agencies that have played a significant role in countering corruption, one such being is the media-Print or Broadcasting, The ability of the media to pre-determine what issues are important gives the media an edge to fight corruption since they can easily lay emphasis on the atrocities being committed by public figures in the country. It raises public awareness about corruption, its causes, consequences and possible remedies. This study is of relevance not only because it brings to the fore the role of media in curbing corruption in Nigeria but it also identifies the obstacles faced by media in the fight against corruption. But before understanding the role played by media, it becomes pertinent to have a conceptual understanding of corruption and also of various forms of corruption which have been dealt in Section A of the paper. Section B of the study examines the history, causes and effects of corruption in Nigeria and in Section C, a discussion of the role of Media in combating corruption in Nigeria that been undertaken. The details of each section follows-

2. Meaning and Forms of Corruption

Corruption has received an extensive attention in the communities and perhaps due to the fact that it has been over-flogged in the academic circles, corruption has received varied definitions. Corruption is coined from the Latin word; corrupt us which in essence means ‘to destroy’. According to Stople (2008), United Nations Convention against corruption recognized corruption as a multi-faceted, dynamic and flexible phenomenon and therefore does not define, but describe corrupt practices (Sowunmi, Raufu, Oketokun, Salako and Usifoh, 2010:8). Klitgaard broadly viewed corruption as misuse of office for unofficial ends. According to him, a “catalogue of corrupt acts includes-but not limited to – bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, the use of “speed money” (money paid to government officials to speed up their consideration of a business matter falling within their jurisdiction) and embezzlement” (Adeyemi, 2013:121). Macrae sees corruption as “an arrangement that involves an exchange between two parties (the demander and the supplier) which i) has an influence on the allocation of resources either immediately or in the future and ii) involves the use or abuse of public or collective responsibility for private ends” (Macrae, 1982:28). Sternberg relates corruption with bribe when he states that a “bribe is an incentive offered to encourage someone to break the rules of the organization he nominally represents and deliver an (unfairly) favorable outcome”. In broader terms, Windsor and Getz define corruption as “socially impermissible deviance from some public duty or more generally some ideal standard of conduct” (Ayodele, 2012:2).

The corruption prevailing in the society can take many forms like-

- i) Political Corruption
- ii) Bureaucratic Corruption
- iii) Electoral Corruption

The details of these are-

- i) Political Corruption: This takes place at the highest levels of political authority. It occurs 'when the politicians and political decision-makers, who are entitled to formulate, establish and implement the laws in the name of the people, are themselves corrupt.' It also takes place when policy formulation and legislation is tailored to benefit politicians and legislators. Political corruption is sometimes seen as similar to corruption of greed as it affects the manner in which decisions are made as it manipulates political institutions, rules of procedure and distorts the institutions of government
- ii) Bureaucratic Corruption: This occurs in the public administration or at the implementation end of politics. This is a low level corruption with which citizens are encountered daily at places like the hospital, schools, police and so on.
- iii) Electoral Corruption: This includes purchase of votes with money, promises of office or special favors, coercion and interference with freedom of election.

Other forms of corruption include-

- a) Bribery: This is a payment that is taken or given in a corrupt relationship
- b) Fraud: This involves some kind of trickery, swindle and deceit, racketing, smuggling and forgery
- c) Embezzlement: This is a theft of public resources by public officials
- d) Extortion: This is the money and other resources extracted by the use of coercion, violence or threats to use force.
- e) Favoritism: This is a mechanism of power abuse implying a highly biased distribution of state resources. It involves favor to friends, family and anybody close and trusted.
- f) Nepotism: This is a special form of favoritism in which an office holder prefers his kinfolk and family members.

These various forms of corruption are seen to be existing in the case of countries like Nigeria. All these different forms have contributed to aggravating the problem of poverty and squalor in the society inspite of being the sixth largest exporter of oil in the world. It therefore becomes pertinent to understand history, causes and the effects of corruption in Nigeria. These issues have been examined in section B.

3. History, Causes and Effects of Corruption in Nigeria

Before identifying the causes of corruption in Nigeria, it becomes significant to have an insight into the country's experience with corruption.

Historically, the origin of corruption in Nigeria predates the colonial era. In 1956, the Foster-Sutton Tribunal of Inquiry investigated the Premier of the defunct Eastern Region, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, for his involvement in the affairs of the defunct African Continental Bank. As per the code of conduct for government officials, a government officer should relinquish his holdings in private business when he assumes public office. But as per the Foster –Sutton Tribunal, Azikiwe did not sever his connections to the bank when he became a Premier. The Tribunal reported that Azikiwe continued to use his influence to promote the interests of the bank (Report of the Foster-Sutton Tribunal of Inquiry, 1956:42; Sklar, 2004: 185). Moreover, Azikiwe, his family and the Zik Group of Companies were the principal shareholders of the African Continental Bank. As indicated in the report of the Tribunal of Inquiry, the bank loaned over 163,000 dollars to the Zik Group of Companies at a lower interest rate and over an extended period which meant that the Zik group did not have to repay the loans until 1971. Thus even before independence there have been cases of official misuse of resources for personal enrichment. After liberation, the problem of corruption continued with little concern for the citizens of the country. The First Republic under the leadership of Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister and Nnamdi Azikiwe, the President, was marked by widespread corruption. Government officials looted public funds with impunity. The Federal Representatives and Ministers flaunted their wealth. It appeared that the political leadership of the First Republic did not have men of good character. They were interested more in making money and living well.

The high level of corruption provided the pretext for the young middle rank army officers to sack the Nigerian First Republic politicians from power through a coup d'état that took place on 15th January 1966, on the ground of corruption. The strong support that the military received for the coup showed that Nigerians were long expecting such a wind of change to free themselves from the clutches of the politicians of that era.

The General Aguiyi Thomas Ironsi military government that replaced the sacked civilian regime instituted a series of commissions of inquiry to investigate the activities of some government parastatals and probe the widespread corruption that characterised the public service sector of the deposed regime. The report on the parastatals, especially the Nigerian Railway Corporation, Nigeria Ports Authority and the defunct Electricity Corporation of Nigeria and Nigeria Airways revealed that a number of ministers formed companies and used their influence to secure contracts. Moreover, they were found guilty of misappropriation of funds as well as disregarding laid down procedures in the award of contracts by parastatals under their Ministries. The corrupt leaders were not punished as the

reins of government came in the hands of the military leaders. The military leaders were no better than the ousted civilian leaders in terms of corruption.

Military leader General Yakub Gowon ruled the country at a time Nigeria experienced an unprecedented wealth from the oil boom of the 1970s. Gowon's regime was also enmeshed in deep seated corruption. By 1974, reports of unaccountable wealth of Gowon's military governors and other public office holders had become the crux of discussion in the various Nigerian dailies. It was mainly for corruption that Gowon administration was toppled by General Murtala Muhammed through a coup d' etat. General Murtala Mohammed began by declaring his assets and asking all government officials to follow suit. He instituted a series of probes of past leaders. Ten of the twelve state military governors in the Gowon regime were found guilty by the Federal Assets Investigation Panel of 1975. The guilty persons were dismissed from the military services and were also forced to give up ill acquired properties considered to be in excess of their earnings (Gboyega, 1996:3).

Other cases of corruption were reported by the Belgore Commission of Inquiry which indicted the Gowon government of inflating contracts for cement on behalf of the Ministry of Defence for private profit at a great cost to the government. In its Report, the Commission noted that the Ministry of Defence needed only 2.9 million tons of cement at a cost of N 52 million as against the 16 million metric tons of cement, it ordered at a cost of N557 million (Ogbeidi, 2012:8). General Murtala was assassinated after only six months in office. He was succeeded by his Chief of Staff, General Olusegun Obasanjo, who did not show the same zeal as his erstwhile boss in the prosecution of wrongdoers. Obasanjo, however, ensured that the reins of government were transferred to civilians in October 1979.

The second republic under President Shehu Shagari, witnessed a resurgence of corruption. The President did nothing to end the looting of public funds by elected officials. Corruption greatly increased amongst the political leaders owing to the availability of funds. Over 16 billion dollars in oil revenues were lost between 1979 and 1983 during the reign of President Shehu Shagari. His weak administration was unable to stop the corruption (Ogbeidi, 2012: 8). The increasing corruption prevalent amongst the ministers and the political lieutenants provided a ground for the occurrence of a coup that was led by General Muhammadu Buhari. General Buhari promised to bring corrupt officials and their agents to book. Consequently, state governors and commissioners were arrested and brought before tribunals of inquiry. But the regime of Buhari was overthrown by General Ibrahim Babangida in a bloodless coup. Under Babangida's thirteen year of rule the corruption reached its alarming rate. According to Maduagwu:

Not only did the regime encourage corruption by pardoning corrupt officials convicted by his predecessors and returning their seized properties, the regime officially sanctioned corruption in the country and made it difficult to apply the

only potent measures, long prison terms and seizure of ill-gotten wealth for fighting corruption in Nigeria in the future (Maduagwu quoted in Gboyega, 1996:5).

Owing to severe public opposition, General Babangida handed the reins of government to a non-elected military-civilian Interim National Government on 26th August 1993 which was later ousted from power by the military under the leadership of General Sani Abacha on 17th November 1993. The Abacha regime only furthered the deep seated corrupt practices, which already characterised public life since the inception of the Babangida regime. General Abacha and his family alongside his associates looted Nigeria's coffers. It was estimated that the embezzlement of public funds and corruption proceeds of General Abacha and his family amounted to USD 4 billion (International Centre for Asset Recovery, 2009). Corrupt practices therefore became blatant and systematic. Successive military regimes subdued the rule of law, facilitated the wanton looting of the public treasury and instituted a secret and opaque culture in running of government business. Corruption became the dominant guiding principle for running the affairs of state.

The study of political history of Nigeria therefore indicates that corruption and leadership have a close nexus. All the leaders assumed power with the sole purpose of enriching themselves and their cronies rather than contributing to the development of the country. However the magnitude of corruption during the era of the various civilian and military regimes cannot be determined with precision because the trend, ways and means of illegal self enrichment were not similar. The military took corruption to its highest levels ever. The military often came to power accusing the ousted military/civilian regime of corruption and incompetence.

Corruption became endemic in the 1990s during the military regimes of Babangida and Abacha but a culture of impunity spread throughout the political class when democracy returned to Nigeria in 1999. In fact, corruption took over as the engine of the Nigerian society and replaced the rule of law. The civilian politicians, their allies in public institutions and collaborators in the private sector, particularly the financial institutions were not any better in corruption.

The transition process from military to civilian rule saw the second coming of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 who assumed office as poor person with all his bank accounts of about N20,000; but eight years later he had expanded agricultural farm at Ota to be worth hundreds of millions of naira (Bankole and Olaniyi, 2014: 31). He now possesses educational institutions that run from primary to university and has over 200 million of shares in various conglomerates (Ibid:31). He sold government property to himself and his cronies below the cost price and House of Representative probe revealed that his administration wasted

16 billion US dollars in power sector with nothing to show for it (Bankole and Olaniyi, 2014:31)

Obasanjo successor, President Umaru Yar' Adua also talked about zero tolerance to corruption but not much was done to curb the menace of corruption. His successor's regime was also known for corruption and hence had little creditability.

A survey on the level of corruption in Nigeria carried out in 2003 by the Institute of Development Research of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria ranked political parties in the country third in the list of thirty most corrupt public institutions in Nigeria (Adekeye, 2003:29). Political parties have been the main avenues for promoting corrupt practices in the country through god fatherism, extortion to mention a few.

There is a consensus among well meaning individuals and foreign nations that corruption has largely retarded the quest for sustainable growth and development in Nigeria.

3.1 Causes of Corruption in Nigeria

Several reasons have been adduced for corruption in Nigeria, one of which is the sudden disappearance of good moral and ethical values. Nwaobi posited that Nigeria must be one of the very few countries in the world where a man's source of wealth is of no concern to his neighbors, the public or the government. Wealthy people who are known to be corrupt are regularly courted and honored by communities, religious bodies, social clubs and other private organizations. This implies that people who benefit from the largesse of these corrupt people rarely ask questions.

Sociological and cultural factors such as customs, family pressures on government officials and ethnicity constitute potential causes of corruption. In Nigeria, although traditional values of gift giving and tributes to leaders often lead to what Brownsberger describes as "polite corruption", the extent of such corruption is relatively small. Dandago revealed that traditional chieftaincy titles and membership of Boards of Directors of government owned corporations are only for the 'influential' individuals in the society who have 'made it' economically or politically. Most of those people made it through enriching themselves fraudulently, but enjoy public respect and accolades. The most annoying thing is that honest and dedicated public servants, who have not accumulated dirty wealth, do not command much respect from the society. These attitudes serve to encourage a new breed of public servants who engage in corrupt practices.

A weak enforcement mechanism like lack of judicial independence: weak prosecutorial institutions is another major cause of corruption in Nigeria. The forces which deter corruption are often weak as some if not most of the law enforcement agencies are themselves corrupt. In addition rulers, politicians and

civil servants are highly corrupt and professional organizations may be incapable of sanctioning their members (Ayodele, 2012:2).

One needs to focus on some systemic conditions in the Nigerian polity that promote corruption. To start with, it is unfortunate that power is concentrated in the hands of decision makers who in reality are not directly accountable to the people as is often seen in non-democratic regimes. This is a direct result of Nigeria's inability since independence to always conduct credible, free, fair and uncontroversial elections to political offices in the country. With political office holders acquiring power through disputable if not illegitimate methods, the situation is not helped by perennial lack of government transparency in decision making. Again costly political campaigns in recent times, with expenses exceeding normal sources of political funding mean that elected officials' first priority on assuming office is to recoup their election expenses. This is facilitated by the design of marginally relevant prestige project requiring expenditure of large amounts of public capital. In the subsequent award of contracts for these projects, self-interested closed cliques, ethnic-cum-family members and "old boys" networks are favoured. The bulk of the bureaucracy with below-living wages and supported by apathetic, uninterested or gullible become actors and accomplices in the public contracts gravy train (Okoye, 2).

But the crux of the present Nigerian corruption problem is the overarching crude oil economy and politics. According to allegations made by some members of the House of Representatives, the Nigerian oil industry appears to be a den of corruption. None outside a certain restricted inner circle of government knows exactly how much oil income flows into the national coffers. Not even the legislature could compel the executive to exhibit total transparency in the handling of Nigeria's oil resources.

3.2 The Effects of Corruption

Corruption with its deep roots has serious effects. It poses a serious developmental challenge. Corruption aggravates poverty, eats up funds that would otherwise have been used to rescue a lot of people from the pain of starvation. In the political realm, it undermines democracy and good governance by subverting formal processes. Corruption in elections and in legislative bodies reduces accountability and fair representation in policymaking; corruption in judiciary undermines or suspends the rule of law and corruption in public administration results in the unequal provision of services. Corruption erodes the institutional capacity of government as procedures are disregarded, resources are siphoned off and officials are hired or promoted without regard to performance. Corruption undermines the legitimacy of government and such democratic values as trust and tolerance. Corruption also undermines economic development by generating considerable distortions and inefficiency. Corruption also generates economic distortions in the public sector by diverting public investment into capital projects where bribes and kickbacks are more plentiful. Corruption also lowers quality of

standards of compliance with construction, environmental or other regulations: reduces the quality of government services and infrastructure. It also increases budgetary pressures on government. This may be the reason why in spite of the unprecedented hikes in crude oil prices that have led to the so-called excess oil revenues, the federal government is still finding it quite difficult to balance its annual budgets.

The above discussed effects indicate that corruption is an evil which must be combated as fiercely as possible with all the resources available. The media therefore has to be in the fore front in this fight. According to Staphenurst, the way in which media serves as an impediment to corruption can be divided into tangible and intangible effects. Tangible effects is made up of the readily identifiable way in which the news media perform these functions that include those in which some sort of visible outcomes can be attributed to particular news story or series of stories on such subjects as: launching of investigation by authorities; scrapping of a law or policy that foster a climate ripe with opportunities for corruption; impeachment or forced resignation of crooked politician and firing of an official, launching of judicial proceeding and issuing of public recommendation by a watchdog body like transparency international. Intangible effects on the other hand, are referred by Staphenurstas those checks on corruption which are inevitably the bye product of hard hitting independent news and can be characterised by broadened sense of accountability amongst politicians, public bodies and institutions (Sowunmi, Raufu Oketokun, Slako, Usifoh, 2010:18).

However for the media to discharge its role effectively and wage a successful war against corruption, it must be armed with the tools and ingredients of the profession.

Independence of the media is not only desirable but a very important factor in the fight against corruption. The political leadership of a nation desirous of fighting corruption must ensure that legislations are put in place to ensure free and unfettered press.

Journalists must be well kitted with adequate Investigative Journalism skills in order to navigate the complex web of highly sophisticated corruption crimes. Since corruption perpetrators are more often than not the highly positioned individuals, journalists must have the necessary training to obtain facts and figures to blow whistle on corrupt practices. Further, journalism requires lots of financial and human resources to function. Media workers must be adequately remunerated to get the best from them and to reduce the possibilities of their being compromised. The journalists reporting corruptions are especially in danger of various forms of attacks and threats. They need to be protected by proper law enforcement agencies (Oyewole, 3).

4. Role of Media in Combating Corruption in Nigeria

Media in Nigeria as in other country has played an important role in informing the public about government programmes and policies, on erring institution and member of the public (private or government employees). Government projects that involve huge sums of money are not only reported to the public but also monitored and reported in both print and broadcast media. Any noticeable mismanagement of resources during or after the completion of such project is reported mostly in newspapers with different front page headlines. They also ensure that such a misdemeanor is not only reported but it is also given necessary follow up. For instance, the monthly held Federal Executive Council meeting in Nigeria usually ended with government approving multi- billion naira projects that will impact positively on the life of the populace, such as rehabilitation of railway, construction of roads and power generation among others. The following day, the media will be flooded with the news on these projects-the location, the amount involved as well as the contractor engaged (Sowunmi, Raufu, Oketokun, Salako and Usifoh, 2010:13).

Not all reported cases of corruption involved only Nigerians; there are other cases with foreigner's collaboration. A very good example is the award of contract to Halliburton, a US construction firm by the Nigerian government. *This Day* Newspaper (Adebowale and Ali, 2009) reported that the firm won the contract after giving 180 million dollars bribe to top Nigerian politicians and government officials, including those of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation. Three former Nigerian Presidents were also said to have benefitted, allegedly spanned the period from 1995 when the nearly 7 billion dollars contract was awarded to 2004 and possibly beyond. After more than five years of investigations covering half a dozen countries, a man named Tesler was arrested early year (2009) at the behest of US authorities and accused of being the person who conveyed the 180 million dollars in bribes to the Nigerian officials (Sowunmi, Raufu, Oketokun, Salako and Usifoh, 2010:13-14)

Cellular News (2009) reported that a court in Munich found Siemens guilty of bribing officials in Nigeria and two other countries for lucrative contracts for telecommunications equipment. The Munich court ruling said EUR 10 million went to Nigerians, including Cornelius Adebayo, Mohammed Bello, the late Alhaji Haruna Elewi and Tajudeen Olarewaju, a retired army major general (Ibid:14). According to *The Economist*, in 2000, Shell companies reported four instances in which a total of seven employees were detected soliciting/accepting/ bribes directly or indirectly. The total financial value was estimated to be 89,000 dollars (Ibid:14)

The problem of corruption has therefore prevailed throughout the history of Nigeria. If corruption existed during the military era; the past and present civilian governments have also their share of corruption in Nigeria. Ribadu (2006) gave a

graphic summary of the situation. He termed the period between 1979 and 1998” the darkest period” in Nigeria’s history of corrupt regimes.

The media has played therefore a significant role in keeping the public informed about the activities of the anti graft body and giving clues about corrupt individuals and organisations. In performing its role, the media has experienced numerous challenges particularly during the military era for the military enacted various decrees to check and suppress the press. These decrees include the Newspapers Prohibition of Circulation Decree 1967; The Newspapers Public Official Reporting Act, 1976; Public Officer’s Protection Against False Publication Decree No.2; The Treasonable Offences Decree No.35 of 1993; The Newspaper Proscription and Prohibition Decrees 48 of 1993. The government of General Abacha also promulgated Decrees in 1994. According Malunzen (1995), perhaps the harshest decree ever promulgated by the military was Decree 4 of 1984, which succeeded in rolling up-defamation, sedition and proscription laws-all in one. Apart from laws such as defamation, sedition and contempt of court which the successive governments in Nigeria have used to put criticizing journalists at bay, there were other laws against the practice of journalism that are contained in the penal code.

However, during the democratic period-1999-2008, President Obasanjo with the establishment of two Anti- graft bodies- The Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission gave an impetus to the press to perform its role effectively.

The fight of media against corruption is not an easy fight for challenges do exist in its struggle against corruption. However, with greater autonomy, with adequate technical, legal, economic expertise, with its ability to reach as much population as possible, the media can play an important role in countering the evil of corruption. This will not only lead to trickling down of benefits of development to the masses and enabling them to improve their economic position but will also benefit the country by way of improving its economic status at the world level.

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