

## Fighting Corruption through a Structural - Institutional Approach: The Role of the Government

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper x-rays the need to start the fight against corruption from structural-institutional approach. The paper finds that despite various approaches taken by successive administrations to rid Nigeria of corruption, the phenomenon of corruption, as it presents itself in the Nigerian polity has assumed an endemic, alarming and systemic proportions. The study was anchored on institutional theory of Scott Richard (1995) and data were secondarily sourced through newspaper publications, journal articles, textbooks, magazines and publications. The paper recommends the need to start the fight against corruption and enthroning transparency through the strengthening of institutions, and increased citizen participation in the governance process. Also, budget expenditures must be scrutinized by the people to ascertain the progress and sincerity of the administration in power, this would help the citizens make their decisions at the polls and ultimately lead to the ascension of credible leaders with concrete plans on how to solve the problems of the country.*

**Keyword:** Administration, Approach, Corruption, Structural-Institutional, Systemic.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the issue of corruption has always been a topical issue and recurring decimal among scholars, politicians, security personnel, ordinary Nigerians, entrepreneurs and stakeholders within and outside Nigeria (Ajah, 2019; Nwune, Ajah, Egbegi, & Onyejebu, 2019; Yusuf & Yahaya, 2014). The reason is clear and not farfetched. It is because corruption has suddenly risen and pervaded every aspect of governance in the country. For instance, a study by Transparency International (2000) ranked Nigeria as the most corrupt country in the world out of 90 countries surveyed, including Kenya, Cameroon, Angola, Nigeria, Côte-d'Ivoire, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Ghana, Senegal, Zambia, India, Venezuela, Moldova, and others. In 2001, Nigeria was ranked the second-most corrupt nation in the world by Transparency International out of 91 countries, second only to Bangladesh.

A study by Global Financial Integrity (2017) observed that despite corruption being a destructive and complex practice; it remains ubiquitous in the functioning of society and economic life in Nigeria. Accordingly, it has been estimated that close to \$400 billion was

stolen from Nigeria's public accounts from 1960 to 1991 and that between 2005 and 2014, \$182 billion was lost through illicit financial flows from the country (Global Financial Integrity, 2017).

Expectedly, Osoba (1996) noted that corruption has caused combination of scandalous wealth among the ruling class with growing poverty, misery and degradation among the mass of Nigerians. Political life has become dominated by winner-take-all factional struggles, political cynicism and violence, while the economy and social institutions have been driven into decay. Acts of diversion of federal and state revenue, business and investment capital, and foreign aid, as well as the personal incomes of Nigerian citizens, contribute to a hollowing out of the country's public institutions and the degradation of basic services (Ajah & Nweke, 2017a; Ajah & Nweke, 2017b; Global Financial Integrity, 2017).

Sadly, despite Nigeria's abundant natural resources, the country is still classified among poor countries in the world. Added to this is the fact that about 54% of the population earns less than \$1 per day. It needs to be stated that the

incidence of extreme paradoxes of widespread and endemic poverty and hunger in the midst of plenty is a manifestation of corruption enmeshed in deteriorating condition of living (Ajah & Ugwuoke, 2018; Aluko, 2002).

Also, in the political system, decisions about policies and resources are made by powerful politicians and their cronies who are linked by informal, personal and clientelist networks that co-exist with the formal state structure (Ajah & Onyejebu, 2019; Nnam, Ajah, Arua, Okechukwu & Okorie, 2019; Nawaz, 2008). Smith (2001) observed that patron-clientelism is the basis of the country's political economy and society.

Corruption has indeed posed serious developmental challenge and is responsible for the poverty of the populace. Public resources meant for the development of all ends up in few hands, the nation pays the price. This has resulted to absence of social amenities such as portable water, electricity and good roads. The populace becomes demoralized and become willing tools to be used as sabotages to the state. It has led to the extinction of institutions of national significance and pride such as Nigerian Airways, National Shipping Lines, Steel Rolling Mills, Nigerian Telecommunication Limited, car assembly plants etc.

While there is increasing scholarship attentions on the measure of fighting corruption. Most literatures are based on intuitive narrations. A robust study especially on using structural-institutional approach in the fight against corruption is certainly lacking. This gap needs not wait further, and it imposes serious limitation to not only efforts to design and carry out a truly scientific and systematic approach to the study of corruption but also causes policy misconception.

### CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW OF CORRUPTION

The definitional issues of corruption is a matter of long-running debate and therefore it is always difficult to settle for any specific definition. Perhaps, that is why Johnston (1991) noted that definitions of corruption are controversial, and solid evidence is often elusive. Descriptive accounts may be clouded by self-serving equivocations. Equally subtle is the question of the significance of a corrupt act- not only its consequence, but also its meaning as perceived by citizens and officials alike. Indeed, the concept of corruption is a multi-dimensional concept that has legal, social, political, economic and ethical connotations. It comes in various forms and dimensions.

The concept of corruption as a word is derived from the Latin word 'corruptus' meaning to break up. The use of the word emphasizes the destructive effect of corruption on the fabric of society and the situations where agents and public officers break the confidence entrusted in them (Essays UK, 2013). According to Nkom (1982), corruption is the perversion of public affairs for private advantage. Nkom further noted that corruption includes bribery or the use of unauthorized rewards to influence people in position of authority either to act or refuse to act in ways beneficial to the private advantage of the giver and then that of the receiver. It includes the misappropriation of public funds and resources for private gains, nepotism etc. In a similar vein, Fagbadebo (2007) described corruption as, the use of official position, resources or facilities for personal advantage, or possible conflict of interest between public position and private benefit.

In the words of Nye (1967), corruption is an act which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private role -regarding influence. Lipset (1995) defined corruption as an effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means for private gain at public expense. For Rogow and Lasswell (1963), corruption is taken to be a violation of the public interest.

In a broader perspective, Ogundiya (2009) sees corruption as subsuming a wide variety of illegal, illicit, irregular, and/or unprincipled activities and behaviours. Gibbons (1976) sees it in terms of politics and believes that political corruption has to do with the way public office forsakes public interest measured in terms of mass opinion in order to ensure that some form of political advantage are achieved at the expense of public interest. Akindele (1995) opined that corruption is a socio-political, economic and moral malaise that is usually holistically permeates all the nerves of any society. The concept of corruption, as observed by Akindele (1995), has ideological, moral, cultural and intellectual discourse. Another simple, uncomplicated and encompassing definition of corruption that is found to be useful is the one that sees the phenomenon as the acquisition of that personal benefits which one (as a member of society not public official alone) is not entitled to (Salawu, 2007). From the definitions x-rayed so far, corruption cause a severe crisis in economic, social and political development of every country.

### CONCEPTUALIZING THE EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION

In contemporary Nigeria, corruption has put every person, both the rich, poor, young, old, foreigners, non-foreigners, male and female at a constant risk of either being a primary or secondary victim. In the words of Okoye (2014), corrupt activity without a doubt hinders development, contributes to the depletion of the public purse and distorts markets, furthering hindering local and Foreign Direct Investment. The growth of a nation depends on the redistribution of its wealth since the middle class and poor benefit is much greater than the affluent, who loss out of the re-distributional process. Countries suffering from corruption cannot implement sound re-distributional policies and are not expected to take benefit from sustainable economic development despite engaging upon economic growth from time to time for some reason or the other. No country or company would like to engage in business with falling economies

Accordingly, Salawu (2007) observed that the phenomenon of corruption in Nigeria has made it impossible for Nigerians to enjoy the dividends of democracy and indeed the gifts of nature with which the country is greatly and abundantly endowed. This scenario is an acknowledgement that the state of affair in the country today is a reflection of pervasive corruption which has eaten deep into every facets of Nigeria life. According to Egbue (2007), corruption is indeed the major explanation for the seemingly insolvable problem of poverty, diseases, hunger and general acute development tragedy in Nigeria. It has also seriously impeded the growth and effective utilization of resources in Africa.

Conclusively, corruption has assaulted every facet of the country's political and socio-economic life Aiyede (2006). Also, our image and reputation is constantly taunted globally due to corruption and it has ridiculed the concept of open and fair competition; hence the continual decline of the economy.

### PAST AND CURRENT APPROACHES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

From 1960 to date, several measures and approaches to eradicate corruption have been employed. These include traditional' legal and governance-based measures, emphasizing the reform of public procurement rules and public financial management, anti-corruption laws and the establishment of various agencies tasked

with preventing corruption and punishing those who engage in it.

The legal approach includes the promulgation of Decrees during the military era; Acts of Parliament during the civil rule periods and establishment of institutions empowered by the law to arrest and prosecute corrupt officials. Among such Decrees are Corrupt Practices Decree of 1975, The Public Officer (Investiga-tion of Assets Decree No 5 of 1976), Forfeiture of Assets, and ETC. (Certain Persons) Decree No 53 of 1999. Other measures during the military era included the use of Tribunal like the Failed Bank Tribunal set up by Abacha military government and a host of others. Constitutional measures include the Code of Conduct Bureau and the Code of Conduct Tribunals provided for in the 1979 and 1999 Constitution (Ogundiya, 2009)

Others include the Shehu Shagari's Ethical Revolution (1979-83), the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) campaign under the Buhari/Idiagbon junta. The Babangida administration introduced what was then tagged the National Committee on Corruption and other Economic Crimes (NCCEC) in its bid to deal with the perennial problem of corruption (Moyosore, 2015).

Consequently, Obasanjo administration laid the vociferous campaign and determination to eliminate corruption in the public life. He proposed and later signed Anti-corruption bill into law. He established two anti-graft commissions, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) (Ogundiya, 2009). With the election victory of Buhari in 2015, there was a feeling that corrupt people would run away to avoid prosecution. When Buhari was inaugurated on May 29, 2015 as President, everybody sat up, convinced that it would not be business as usual. There were indeed arrests. However, months later, it was obvious that the President is embarking on what seems like selective and tepid fight against corruption which has worsened the situation.

### FIGHTING CORRUPTION THROUGH A STRUCTURAL-INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH

In spite of the various efforts made and measures taken by successive administrations to rid Nigeria of corruption, the phenomenon of corruption, as it presents itself in the Nigerian polity has assumed an endemic, alarming and systemic proportions. Sadly, the government is yet to understand that the current legal and governance-based approach of fighting corruption is not achieving the desired

result. Funnily, suspects and offenders receive sympathy and support from many Nigeria citizens. This focus on legal and governance-based approach is critically important, but innovative and structural-institutional approaches are needed to foster a comprehensive shift in deeply ingrained attitudes to corruption at all levels of society.

The essence of advocating this approach is to build trust with Nigerians through methods of strengthening institutional structures that help to enhance the perceived legitimacy efforts of fighting corruption. This logic dates back to a well-accepted adage that effective crime control relies upon support and cooperation from the general public and that if members of the public do not regard authorities and laws as legitimate, they are less likely to defer to those authorities and laws (Cherney & Hartley, 2015).

### THEORETICAL PREDICTION

The theoretical framework is institutional theory of Scott Richard (1995). This theory is a theory on the deeper and more resilient aspects of social structure. It considers the processes by which structures, including schemes, rules, norms, and routines, become established as authoritative guidelines for social behavior. Different components of institutional theory explain how these elements are created, diffused, adopted, and adapted over space and time; and how they fall into decline and disuse.

Scott (1995) defines institutions as social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience. These institutions are composed of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life. Institutions are transmitted by various types of carriers, including symbolic systems, relational systems, routines, and artifacts. Institutions operate at different levels of jurisdiction, from the world system to localized interpersonal relationships. Institutions by definition connote stability but are subject to change processes, both incremental and discontinuous.

In this context, institutional theory is a policy-making theory that emphasizes the formal and legal measures of fighting corruption. States with poor institutions cannot successfully fight corruption. This is because weak institutions and inappropriate policy choices pose enormous challenges to the fight against corruption, a situation which has seen Nigeria move two steps forward and four steps backwards. The end result is what is rampant across Nigeria today;

conspicuous consumption, absence of loyalty to the state, oppressive and corrupt state institutions, to mention a few. Also, strong institutions in Nigeria would help mitigate uncertainties in the fight against corruption and fast track developmental programmes in the country.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the above cases x-rayed, it is obvious that winning the fight against corruption in Nigeria with current measures is farfetched. This challenge has led to serious infrastructural damage in the areas of education, health and social welfare facilities, poor economy, while millions of Nigerians are left in abject poverty and hopeless.

Since previous approaches have not achieved the desired results, we need to start the fight against corruption and enthroning transparency through the strengthening of institutions, and increased citizen participation in the governance process. We need measures like: providing power and infrastructure, re-energizing the agricultural sector, providing incentives for investment, kick-starting manufacturing through an industrial revolution, clear economic foreign policies to win the war against corruption. Constantly engaging public office holders and constructively questioning policies and actions would improve the nation. Budget expenditures must be scrutinized by the people to ascertain the progress and sincerity of the administration in power, this would help the citizens make their decisions at the polls and ultimately lead to the ascension of credible leaders with concrete plans on how to solve the problems of the country. Finally, there is need to identify ways to leverage international resources to support and sustain good governance.

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