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Corruption in Nigeria: The Possible Way Out

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Abstract- This paper analyzed corruption in Africa using Nigeria as a case study. It states that corruption is alien to Africa and that a sizable number of African pre-colonial nations – states were founded on strong ethical values ensuring social justice and compliance. The paper therefore argues that colonialism imported corruption to Africa and by extension Nigeria. It explains corruption from different perspectives and concluded that corruption is innate and deep seated in Nigeria particularly in the public sector. The paper then identified non – conformity religious tenets, values, culture, ethnicity, favoritisms, nepotism and weak legal systems among others as the causes of corruption in Nigeria. Thus the paper finds four factors as the costs of corruption in the country – political, economic, social and environmental. Finally, the paper put forward nine points as possible options and frame-work for curbing corruption in Nigeria.

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I. INTRODUCTION

When specifically viewed with Africa's history in mind, administrative corruption, thought rampant across Africa today is an alien culture. Pre-colonial Africa, for the most part, was founded on strong ethical values sometimes packaged in spiritual terms, but with the end result of ensuring social justice and compliance. In both centralized and decentralized pre-colonial African communities, governance was conducted with the utmost seriousness. As the laws were mostly unwritten in nature and therefore prone to being easily forgotten, they were often couched in supernatural terms to instill fear and be instilled in the subconscious.

Examples abound of the heavy emphasis on accountability and good governance across several pre-colonial African communities. In West Africa, the Asante confederation was a kingdom that thrived on strict rules and regulations. Established by seven clans close to the city of Kumasi, the Kingdom was held together by the symbolic Golden Stool of Asante-Hene. With strong cooperation from all groups the leadership of the Asante kingdom was known, according to Emizet Kisangani, to have “implemented several modernization policies in administration that included promoting advancement by

merit and the development of state enterprise through public investment.” The Asante were able to “build roads and promoted agriculture, commerce, industry and education through self-help and self-reliance.”

Among the Yoruba of south western Nigeria, the institution of *Oyo-mesi* the king making body, acted as a check against the abuse of power by the Alafin (the Oba) or the King of Oyo. The Alafin was constrained to rule with caution and respect for his subjects. When he is proven to have engaged in acts that undermined the interests of his subjects, such as gross miscarriage of justice for personal gains, the *Oyo-mesi* would, in the words of Yunusa Salami “present him with an empty calabash or parrot’s eggs as a sign that he must commit suicide” since he could not be deposed, according to tradition.

In the Igbo acephalous society, the absence of any form of overarching authority, by itself, placed leadership in the hands of the people – the very epitome of accountability and good governance. The titled chiefs sat together to address the more difficult issues of governance, and there is a saying among the Igbo that a “titled man does not lie.” If one wanted to hear the truth, to be granted pristine justice according to the prevailing standards, s/he only needed to get the impeccable body of titled men to hear the case in question.

Pre-colonial Rwanda had a highly organized, efficient and centralized system of administration. Although an autocratic and hierarchical system presided over by the king, there were systems of checks and balances among those who ruled at the clan level. A variant of the land ownership, *Ubukonde* permeated pre-colonial Rwanda. It was a custom of mutually beneficial exchange of labour between the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, set on agreed principles. At the time it existed, *Ubukonde* was accepted by all parties involved and those who tried to amass land wealth in a corrupt manner outside of the *Ubukonde* system incurred the wrath of the King. Numerous examples abound across sub-Saharan Africa, but in all, what held these communities together and brought administrative corruption down to the barest minimum was a set of rules and regulations, agreed principles and moral values that guided human interactions.

Colonialism introduced systemic corruption on a grand scale across much of sub-Saharan Africa. The repudiation of indigenous values, standards, checks and balances and the pretensions of superimposing western structures destabilized the well-run bureaucratic machinery previously in existence across pre-colonial

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Africa. The end result is what is rampant across Africa today; conspicuous consumption, absence of loyalty to the state, oppressive and corrupt state institutions, to mention few. There are several ways that colonialism contributed to the prevalence of corruption across sub-Saharan Africa.

Indirect rule turned leadership in Africa into a corrupted enterprise where instead of holding power in trust for the people, the rulers held power in trust for the colonial authorities. Government became an antagonistic platform for forcefully extracting obedience from the people. In several instances, the dregs of the society, the rejects, the ones that hitherto had no say in the community were promoted as warrant chiefs by British authorities. Individuals without character who demanded money in exchange for manipulating the colonial masters enthroned corruption at the highest echelon of governance. To avoid being punished for the grave crime of being citizens, the people saw bribery as a first and last resort, if at all they were to be granted access to the most basic rights.

With little or no knowledge of the economic earnings of potential tax payers, colonial masters imposed flat-rate taxes known as hut tax on the colonies. The mode of tax payment was often steeped in violence, whereby district commissioners or warrant chiefs were empowered to arrest any defaulter. The hut tax was mainly used in paying salaries and emoluments for colonial officers and in running the colonial office. There were very little benefits the people could see in the form of social services, in return for the taxes they paid. The result was the evolution of a latently corrupt system, devoid of accountability, and which pitched citizens against themselves and against the ruling class.

The history of police and military formations in several parts of the world can be traced to the need to protect citizens and ensure territorial integrity. Conversely, in the case of Africa, the police and military were established primarily to crush civilian opposition to colonial rule. Police engagement with the populace was founded on the need to enforce hateful and debilitating colonial laws, including forced taxation, segregation, and quelling of anti-colonial uprisings. At the end of colonialism, the newly independent African government inherited institutions that had internalized a culture of citizen oppression and extortion. The immediate post-colonial police and military were designed to inflict terror on innocent citizens, and citizens had internalized the art of buying their way off unwarranted harassment. The major challenge for immediate post-colonial African leadership was how to embark on massive reorientation exercises. This challenge was not taken seriously by successive administrations across the continent. Even in cases where the need was recognized, resources was lacking that could bring about internally generated transition.

Pre-colonial Africa as earlier indicated was known for emphasis on strong moral values. Those who were circumstantially rendered unfit as a result of age, ill-health or physical impairment were well taken care of. Colonialism destabilized the prevailing pre-colonial system, uprooted men from the farms to work for the white man as houseboys, miners, clerks and in other menial capacities. The monetization occasioned by this exercise introduced a form of greed, unknown in the culture of most pre-colonial African societies. Rather than hard working and morally upright members of society acting as role models for the younger generation, colonial masters, who lived in 'big' houses, drove 'big' cars and treated Africans with disdain were who most Africans aspired to become like.

The prevailing culture of acquisition of alien tastes, a culture of consumerism rather than production, and the oppression of the less endowed are the natural outcome of idolizing usurpers and people who reaped where they did not sow. Sixty years later, Africans, for the most part, remain enchanted with the trappings of modernity, without the character to cultivate it. Fast cars, big houses, expensive vacations to the west, Brazilian wigs and others are only some of the manifestations of a generation mentored by pilferers and oppressors in the form of colonial authorities.

The above are some of the means through which the unfortunate incident of colonialism engendered a culture of indifference to nation building, and a penchant for corruption across much of sub-Saharan Africa. This essence of this summary introduction is not to play the blame game or bring about the wringing of hands in regret, but to understand the past – a luxury which the continued dominance of western thoughts in the academia and media has denied Africa – in order to mend the future.

Corruption is a cancer that has eaten deeply into the fabric of Nigeria polity. The general global perception about graft in Nigeria is that it is generally acknowledged that corrupt practices are endemic and systemic in both public and private sectors of Nigeria. From the forgoing it is evident that corruption undermines the country's integrity and security. It also poses serious developmental challenge being 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.

II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

a) Corruption

In view of the foregoing this paper provides a conceptual framework web, conceptual clarification corruption as a term is uncertain and indeed devoid of any strait jacket definition. It depends on who is defining and from what perspective. What is corruption? If you are a typical Nigerian, you would define it as government officials looting our treasury. One could view; everything starts and ends in government offices. It will surprise you that almost everybody is campaigning against corruption in Nigeria? We are all waging a war against corruption. The main reason Nigeria is not making progress we say authoritatively is that those in government are just stealing public money. Corruption in Nigeria is not the exclusive preserve of politicians, civil servants, and captains of industry. Among the "common people" there is an instinctive honing of stealing skills. One should stop thinking people suddenly become corrupt when they join the government. However having been tutored and mentored on petty stealing from probably the age of five, Nigerians naturally explode when they occupy positions of authority at any level either in private or public sector. They join the bandwagon of selfish leaders after suddenly finding themselves in the corridor of power Rather than use their positions to repair its ills; they conform to the enrichment craze. In other words corruption is defined as the involvement in illegal, dishonest, or wicked behaviour which is destructive of the moral fabric of society. To some people corruption "is the conscious and will plan act by a person or group of persons to appropriate by unlawful means the wealth of another person or group of persons".

The concept "Corruption" like many other concepts in social sciences has no settled meaning. This means that there is no straight backed definition, or generally accepted, or encompassing definition for the term corruption.

However, certain definitional attempts have been proffered by different scholars. Although, there is often difficulties in defining it, because it means not only different things to different people, and even to the same people different things at different times, but also sanctions usually are attached to corrupt practices which hides them and gives them subtle forms.

Thus, some people see "corruption" as a conscious and well planned act by a person or group of persons to appropriate by unlawful means the wealth of another person or group of persons. Then to others, it is the act of turning power and authority to ready cash.

For (Agbese, 1982), "corruption is a phenomenon so difficult to define, yet it percolates every structure of the society. It affects the military as well as it soils the hands of the civilians". He went further to define corruption as follows ...

"When we use our position in society to secure certain advantages jumping a queue, being waved off at the checkpoint or making others bend the rules to accommodate our demands ... by whatever means even if it is just 'thank you' our action however innocent, however well-intentional, however unthreatening to others, has corrupted a system or a convention or some rules and regulations in application."

In this regard, even whatever form of seasonal gifts, free air tickets, lunch or diner – "kola" is no longer exempted, since these are likely to influence future courses of action and transactions the giver or receiver is thus corrupting protocol or breaching some rules and regulations in the society (Nigeria) etc. Professor Abdullahi, Smith, for instance saw "corruption as the diversion of resources from the betterment of the community to the gain of individuals at the expense of the community". (Mumullan 1961: 183 – 4) point out that a public official is corrupt if he accepts money or money's worth for doing something that he is under a duty to do or to exercise a legitimate discretion for improper reason. Then for Malam Adamu Ciroma, corruption is "the deliberate binding of the system to favour friends or hurt foes, any misbehaviour deviation from or perversion of the system, or misleading Nigerians or giving them wrong or distorted information about things they ought to know."

Thus, any act or behaviour or omission, committed, internationally or not to influence the actions of another, the influential and the influenced, respectively has corrupted a system which is detrimental to the entire society.

In another perspective, the political science school see "corruption" as "an optimal means of bypassing the queues and bureaucratic inertia and hence conducive to economic growth". While the economics school like (Krueger 1974), saw "corruption" as "an external manifestation of rent seeking behaviour on the part of individuals"

But the Webster Dictionary defines corruption as:

... that act of corruption or the state of being corrupt putrefactive decomposition, putrid matter, moral pervasion depravity, pervasion of integrity. Corrupt or dishonest proceedings, bribery, perversion from a state of purity, debasement as of a language; a debased form of a word.

Brownberger described corruption as a misapplication of public goods (broadly construed) to private ends. Edward C. Bandfield definition of corruption which we subscribe to for its elaborate and precise nature, defines corruption as the process of obtaining material enrichment or opportunities for oneself and or for others, through the use of public office (or influence) in ways other than those publicly acknowledge through rules and procedures of what

office. This includes such behaviours as bribery (use of reward to pervert the judgment or actions of a person in a position of trust) nepotism bestowal of patronage by reasons of inscriptive relationship rather than merit and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources for private uses).

To others it is the act of turning power and authority into ready cash. To yet another group, it is the diversion of resources for the betterment of the community to the gain of individuals at the expense of the community. Black law dictionary however defines corruption thus:

An act done to give some advantage inconsistent with the official duty and rights of others. The act of Official or Judiciary person, who unlawfully wrongly uses his position or character to procure some benefit for himself or the right of others.

The dictionary in the second segment of its definition says that: "*Corruption is the act of doing something with intent to give some advantage in consistent with official duty and right of others or officials* use of a station or office to produce some benefit either personally or for someone else contrary to the right of others". The new edition of the chambers 20th century dictionary defines the term beyond the pilfering of public funds, the amassing of fortunes by illegal or corrupt means does not seem to necessarily disturb the average Nigerian as to make him lose sleep over it.

Also, the British Department for International development (DFID) maintains in its „Nigeria country strategy paper for the year 2000, that poverty persists in Nigeria because of the mismanagement of resources and corruption found practically but not exclusively in the public sector.

The World Bank defines corruption as:

The abuse of public office for private gains. Public office is abused for private gain when an official accepts edicts or extorts a bribe. It is also abused when private agents actively offer bribes to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit. Public office can also be abused for personal benefit even if no bribery occurs through patronage and nepotism, the thereof state assets or the diversion of state resource.

The Asian development bank understand corruption as involving„the behaviour on the part of officials in the public and private sectors, in which they improperly and unlawfully enrich themselves and on these closely related to them, or induce others to do so, by misusing the position in which they are placed. 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. Corruption may not be easy to define but, according to (Tanzi, 1998), it is "generally not difficult to

recognize when observed." Corrupt acts required a minimum of two individuals from one or more communities, and either exchange or the promise of an exchange of money.

According to (Salisu, 2000), the simple definition of corruption is that it is the misapplication of public resources to private ends. For example, public Officials may collect bribes for issuing Passports or Visa, for providing goods at sea/airport for awarding contracts or artificial scarcity. (Konie, 2003) identified two types of corruption, these are, Vertical corruption, which involves managers and decision makers. This is common in less developed countries and; Horizontal corruption, which involves the entire Officials, informed and laymen groups in the countries. The two types of corruption should be seriously addressed and eradicated if any meaningful economic or political progress is to be made.

Corruption also reduces economic growth, enhances inequalities and reduces the government's capacity to respond to people's needs. All these swerve down to create poverty in the society". Corruption distorts economic and social developments, by engendering wrong choices and by encouraging competition in bribery rather than in the quality and price of goods and services and, all too often, it means that the world's poorest must pay for the corruption of their own officials and of multinationals" agents. Corruption leads to a grooving gap between the rich and the poor and deepens poverty by enriching a few at the expense of fellow citizens. Under a corrupt system, there is a concentration of wealth in the hands of a tiny minority of the population. Resultantly income distribution becomes highly skewed.

Closely associated with the connection of wealth in the hands of the few, a distorted consumption pattern, aimed at meeting the luxurious lifestyle of the urban elite, emerge, According to (Transparency International (TI), 2008) Corruption is the misuse of entrusted power for private gains. TI went further to differentiate between "according to the rules" Corruption and "against the rule" Corruption. Facilitation payments where a bribe is paid to receive preferential treatment for something that the bribe receiver is required to do by law, constitute the former. The latter on the other hand is a bribe paid to obtain services the bribe receiver is prohibited from providing. Some researchers have defined corruption to be related only to bribery and unlawful payments, (Grunner, 1999; Ojaide, 2000), defines Corruption as "any systematic vice in an individual, society or a nation which reflects favoritism, nepotism, tribalism, sectionalism, undue enrichment or amassing of wealth, abuse of office, power position and derivation of undue gains and benefits. Corruption also includes bribery, smuggling, and fraud, illegal payments, money laundering, drug trafficking.

falsification of documents and records, window dressing, false declaration, tax evasion of any kind to the detriment of another person, community society or nation. The pertinent question here is: what is the cause of corruption in Nigeria?

b) *Causes of Corruption*

Many reasons have been put forward as probable causes for the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria. This ranges from non-conformity to religious tenets, imparted values and ideas alien to our culture, ethnicity which encourages favoritism and nepotism, a weak legal system which is honored in the breach than observance.

The political bureau in its report mentioned such causes as excessive materialism generated by our individual capitalist order which emphasize personal wealth without regard to the collective interest and welfare of the larger society. Other causes of poverty, illiteracy, get-rich- mania, statism, and wrong attitude to public property, absence of a welfare scheme which cushions effect of unemployment, retirement, large families, and quest for power, double standards and low level of patriotism. These are important in themselves; it does appear that poverty is the most important single factor that promotes the wide spread of giving and taking bribes i.e. illegal financial inducements in the country. As regards features of corruption, the most common are:

- a) Giving and receiving bribes
- b) Inflation of contracts
- c) Kick back and payment upfront
- d) Abuse of public property
- e) Lodging government fund in private accounts
- f) Examination malpractices
- g) Adulterated food or hazardous drugs
- h) Misappropriation and embezzlement of fund
- i) Money laundry by public officers
- j) Using proxy names to buy property.

Thus, (Nwaobi 2004) posited that Nigeria must be one of the very few countries in the world where a mans' source of wealth is of no concern to his neighbor, 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. In Nigeria, although traditional values of gift giving and tributes to leaders often lead to what (Berger, 1983) describes as "Polite Corruption", the extent of such corruption is relatively small. (Dadajo, 2008) 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 these 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. According to (Maduegbuna, 2005), the benefits of corruption are greater than the consequences of being caught and disciplined. High incidence of poverty, which according to (National Bureau of Statistics, 2005) is put at 54.1% contributed in no small amount to the desperation of Nigeria to acquire Wealth through any means. While the few employed received low wages, unemployment is high. The unemployed are mostly the youths engaged in anti social activities such as cyber crime, drug peddling, prostitution, political thuggery, paid assassins, oil bunkering, kidnapping, militancy (Niger Delta) among others; all in the name of money. (Jimo et al, 2001) attributed corruption within the (Africa) region“s public administration to over – centralization of power, lack of media freedom to expose scandals, the impunity of well connected officials and absence of transparency in public fund management, clienteles and low salaries. (Dandago, 2008) observed that the poor salary levels of most public servants have not kept pace with inflation, which has eroded their purchasing power. It is also clear that the process of gaining power in Nigeria is either by armed force or the influence of money.

It is in this regard that, (Chobal, & Daloz, 1999) reasoned that in Africa, such factors as the Obligations of mutual support, the imperatives of reciprocity, the importance of gift exchange, the payment of tribute, the need to redistribute even the habits of cattle rustling or, more generally, of plundering others, all have a bearing on the continent today. There are also those who believe that modern bribery may not be seen as cognate with traditional gift giving since it takes place outside the context of a patron – client relationship. Ethnically, the poor man“s bribe to the faceless power he will never meet again is completely distinct from his traditional gift to a patron.

III. THE CONSEQUENCE AND EFFECT OF CORRUPTION

The cost of corruption can be classified into four factors“, political, economic, social, and environmental. On the political front corruption constitutes a major obstacle to democracy and the rule of law .In a democratic system, offices and institution lose their legitimacy when they are misused for private advantage. This is harmful to our democracy. Our democracy and political leadership cannot develop in a corrupt climate.

Economically, corruption leads to the depletion of our national wealth. It has led to the use of scarce

public resources to finance uneconomic high profile projects such as power plants pipelines that cost billions whereas if these were channel towards building schools, hospitals and roads or the supply of Electricity and water to rural areas which are basic needs of life. This has hindered the development of fair market structures which has led to job losses and also affects investment.

On the social ladder, the people have lost their trust in the political system. In its institutions and leadership, they have developed nonchalant attitude and general apathy towards government policies resulting in a weak civil society. Environmental degradation is yet another consequence of corrupt systems. The non enforcement of environmental regulations and legislation has led to the pollution of the environment in Nigeria. Careless exploitation of Natural resources from oil and minerals by domestic and international agents hassled to ravaged natural environments affecting the health of her citizens. Most environmental devastating project are given preference in funding, because they are easy target for siphoning of public funds into private pockets.

IV. POSSIBLE SOLUTION TO AVERTING CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

- *Restoration of indigenous values and institutions:* Nigerian indigenous values and systems were for the most part debunked by first, the missionaries, then the colonialists in a much more forceful manner. Indigenous solutions to corruption must once again be explored followed by the rediscovery of indigenous systems of administration. Rwanda has successfully done the latter through the *Gacaca, Abunzi, Umuganda, Umudugudu* and other indigenous systems. The above is by no means a call for Nigeria Christians and Muslims to revert to African traditional religion as is often perceived whenever the indigenous is mentioned. Far from it. The merging of Nigeria's social, cultural, and moral values with its religion was the handiwork of some over-zealous missionaries and racist colonialists. Nigerians have come of age to separate between religion and other causes and to realize that one can be fully functioning in his chosen religion and still abide by several positively rewarding indigenous Nigerian values.
- *Formal, Informal and non-formal Education:* The greatest vehicle for cultural transmission towards a transformation of prevailing social paradigm is education. In its formal form, the curriculum of learning across Nigerian must be overhauled to make for real mental and intellectual independence. In its non-formal manifestation, conferences, workshops, camps, and other non-formal learning situations must be widely utilized to re-educate citizens on the fact that real living occurs only when

individuals have sound moral values, or at least, consistently and seriously aspire to it. Informally, the media will be mobilized as a crucial element of mass mobilization towards an appreciation of the Nigeria's authentic social, cultural and economic environment.

- *Religion as a nation building institution:* Nigerians listen to their spiritual leaders, much more than they do politicians and policy makers. The pulpit ought to be mobilized as a knowledge and faith-based platform for reaching the souls of Nigerians and in directing them towards nation-building.
- *Promotion of the "African" nation state:* For the past 50 years, Nigerians have been struggling in vain to assimilate the artificially imposed colonial boundaries. It is time to promote the greater African nation-state and de-emphasize the cosmetic divisions that is filled with antagonistic ethnic groups.
- Nigerians must be encouraged, motivated and facilitated to travel widely across the continent in order to overcome the ethnic animosities that was ignited by colonialism, established by the post colonial tussle for power among ruling elites, and strengthened by geographic claustrophobia.
- *Strengthening of anti-graft institutions:* Strong anti-graft institutions are a necessity across Nigeria state, as in any other part of the world. Governments across Nigeria should appoint credible and determined individuals who may even be nationals of other African countries, to take up the fight against corruption in the high and low places. A strengthened judiciary is a necessity in this respect.
- The need for the establishment of anti corruption court that will take charge of all criminal cases against corrupt politicians and administrators.
- The EFCC need leadership that commands legitimacy, which will enable them to assert their independence and build the integrity with its rank and file. EFCC should be empowered and grant absolute autonomy in handling cases relating to corruption. Anti corruption laws, legislations and regulations should be written in simpler language and made accessible to the populace.
- *Economic growth:* Poverty breeds vice. Nigeria government should embark on not just the deceptive increment in Gross Domestic Product, but real development in terms of standard of living. Health, education, food security, and infrastructural growth must be given prominence.

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