

Full Length Research Paper

The Civil/Public Service, Corruption and Nigeria Underdevelopment

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The issue of corruption in Nigeria has been topical and recurring, forming a central theme in national discusses; being an endemic malaise defying every effort at fighting it by various administrations, be it military or civilian. Both scholars and Nigerian governments have not been able to proffer any realistic practicable solution or recipe to tackle this canker worm eating deep into the fabrics of our national life. The problems of corruption in Nigeria have become very worrisome, more-so, given the huge and enormous resources of the country, which have brought much money to the coffers of government. The country has remained poor and low in terms of infrastructural, economic and social development. This situation among other factors has its roots in corruption, through which the country's wealth is misappropriated and stolen by corrupt public office holders, both in government and private sectors, making corruption the order of the day. The paper tried to examine the nature and expanse of corruption in Nigeria, through the prism of Nigeria's civil/public service, down to the various sectors and sections of the society. Furthermore, the paper interrogates the causes and stimulants of corruption in Nigeria, which appears to be fashionable among the Nigerian populace. This effort proffers a novel thesis that locates and traces the core reason for official corruption in Nigeria to fiscal centralism of the Nigerian state that claims to practice federalism. This aberration gives the majority tribes the leverage to control the resources of the minority states, especially the Niger delta region, where the oil resources are located; 'infecting government officials with 'Other People's Money (OPM) Syndrome' engendering massive and enduring corruption, looting, and mismanagement. The paper drew resource mostly from both secondary sources and primary experiential records of the author. Through its finding and analysis, the paper concludes that the issue of corruption is indeed endemic and hydra-headed, and has permeated deep into the fabric of our society's economic, political and even cultural life. The solution lies in a radical restructuring of Nigerian polity to adopt the right fiscal formulas. The paper recommends among other things, the adoption and practice of fiscal federalism to stimulate the harnessing and exploitation of the untapped rich resources of the various states and ethnic nationalities, than depending on one resource that has elicited the malaise of OPM syndrome.

Key Words: Corruption, Endemic, Instability, Fiscal Federalism and Development.

INTRODUCTION

The civil/public service refers to a crop of people who manage the day to day affairs of a country. The 1999 constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria under the fundamental objectives and principles of state policy holds that sovereignty and power belongs to the people from whom government through the Constitution derives all its

powers and authority. So Government officials whether elected or appointed including the police, army, customs, immigration among others, exercise power on behalf of the citizens and exist to promote their welfare.

The civil/public servants are charged with the responsibilities of the overall management of the human and material resources of the country and maintenance of a civil society. Their services therefore, have direct releva-

-nce to our national economic and political wellbeing, since they plan and execute Government programs with the objectives: to promote national unity and overall development as to raise the standard of living of Nigerians through proper management of the natural resources. Given this pre-eminent and crucial position of the civil/public service, the development and stability of the nation depends on the efficiency of its civil/public workforce.

The need for effectiveness and efficiency of the civil service cannot be overemphasized, especially in the situation where much pressure is being exerted on the inadequate resources available to the populace of the country. It has been observed that lack of speedy development and instability in most third world countries including Nigeria stem from corruption, indiscipline, and inefficiency of the civil service. A corrupt, inefficient and morally bankrupt civil/public service becomes a clog in wheel of development and stability of any nation.

Underdevelopment of a country relates to the low level of development characterized by low real per capital income, wide-spread poverty, lower level of literacy, low life expectancy and underutilization of resource. (Google-Gk today, December 31, 2017). In Nigeria the problem of a corrupt civil service has created a chaotic political and economic situation emanating from lack of accountability, sharp practices, grafting and all shades of corruption in the country among the operators of Government. In this paper, we shall examine the historical background of the Nigerian civil service and make a critical evaluation of corruption, especially its root causes and the overall underdevelopment of the country.

THE NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVICE: AN HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

By 1903, most of the territories that constitute what is today known as Nigeria have been conquered by Britain in the era of the "New imperialism." Professor Ake (1981) described the New Imperialism as "a colonizing imperialism." The major objective of the New Imperialism is the colonization of foreign lands by the imperial powers for economic exploitation. The civil service of Nigeria was formally established from 1900 for administrative purposes, first in the colony of Lagos, which was later merged with the southern protectorate in 1906 and named the protectorate of southern Nigeria. The British equally established the civil service in the northern Nigeria called the protectorate of northern Nigeria (Nwosu, 1977). In its bid to administer the country with the objective of imperialism, Britain imposed a unified alien civil service on Nigeria without giving thought to its impact on the Nigerian traditional communities with their conflicting values, interest, norms and authority structure. Okoli and

Onah (2002) maintains that the civil service at this time was mainly for the maintenance of law and order, and raising enough revenue to sustain the colonial authority, and not for economic and social development of the Nigerian territory.

In 1914 the northern and southern territories of the conquered Nigerian areas were amalgamated into one country named Nigeria. This amalgamation was informed by administrative convenience and, economic expediency. The British considered it wise and financially expedient for the rich, and more developed south to be merged with the poor and less developed north into one administrative unit.

A colonial administration was thereafter set up for the sole purpose of economic exploitation of the entire country in consonance with the objectives of the new imperialism. In pursuance of the colonial objectives, the Government took lands without compensation and appropriated the products, and material resources of the Nigerian people, which they took to Britain as raw materials for their home factories. At the same time, the country was turned into market for goods produced by the British factories. In the same manner, the colonial Government imposed heavy taxes on the people with harsh laws and policies.

The colonial policies and programs of monetization, taxation, wage labour and lop-sided Education forced the Nigerian rural population into producers of cash crops and consumers of foreign goods, while food production was de-emphasized (Amugo 1998). The colonial civil service was the machinery by which the Government used in the exploitation of human and material resources of the Nigerian territories. The colonial civil servants internalized the orientation of aggressive exploitation embarked upon by the colonial Government against the Nigerian people in every facet of the society. The colonial civil servants behaved like „tin gods“ and discriminated against the Nigerian populace who therefore saw the government as opposed to their general interest and wellbeing. After the attainment of political independence, the British officials in the colonial civil service of Nigeria eventually left the service to pave the way for Nigerians to take over the positions they vacated in Government.

With the replacement of the foreign officials in the post-independence, the new Nigerian civil service was expected to showcase a new attitude and be patriotic and efficient to serve the indigenous democratic project for stability and survival of the polity; more so, since it is the vehicle and machinery of public policy formulation and implementation. Ayodele and Bolaji (2007) in this regard, opines that democracy with its attractive values will enhance the workings of the public service and redefine, re-orientate and reposition it to be more attractive, mobile and productive partner in national reconstruction agenda. Civil service in developing societies, coming out from

independence is everything and the most important catalyst of development. In the same vein, Agagu (1997) contends that public and civil service is continuously the active business part of government, concerned with carrying out laws as made by the legislative bodies in the process of organization and management.

The Nigerian civil service has compromised in many respects and fallen short of the expectations of Nigerians. It has undermined its capacity to serve as an agent of national development, lacking in technical competence, failing in ethics and failing in its roles in system maintenance but rather engaged in high level corruption and lack of accountability. The Nigerian civil and public servants are today known and associated with such vices as: embezzlement of public funds, red tapism, bribery, Nepotism, favoritism, grafting, fraud and other forms of corruption. Some public civil servants go as far as colluding with foreigners to defraud the country through inflation of contracts and other unwholesome methods.

Synopsis of Corruption in the Nigerian Public Life.

Corruption has been described as the canonizations of fraudulence; brazen celebration of impunity, which pollutes the ethical hygiene of a society. For Ogbunwezeh (2005), corruption in Nigeria has become pervasive and polluting all the fabrics of Nigerian society. Corruption occurs when people try to get what they do not deserve through various means such as bribing, ethnic connections, favoritism, contract inflation, name dropping, threats, harassment and other unwholesome influences. No wonder corruption has been described as a perversion or a change from good to bad. Sen (1999), offers that corruption or corrupt behaviors as is seen and observed in different spheres in Nigeria, involves the violation of established rules for personal gains and profit. Lipset also and Lez, (2000) also sees corruption as efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means, private gain or at public expense.

Corruption is so endemic in all facets of our society that it has become a major topic of research in the academic circles. Some scholars in the humanities and social sciences have enunciated radical models to study and tackle this social malady in our public life. Corruption could be identified in areas such as, Elections, public office positions, police roadblocks, customs and immigration check-points, colleges, Universities, courts, petrol stations, banks, and other private and Government operations. It has been observed that the underdevelopment, economic and social and political crises in the country is traceable to high level of corruption in the nation's public life. Corruption takes different forms and is perpetrated at all levels and facets of our society especially the public sector. Most of the inefficiencies and vices associated with the public service emanate from the

deliberate work attitude of civil servants like, "come today, come tomorrow", hiding of files, and red tapism, which force people to resort to bribery and tips in order to get quick and desired results or transact their businesses in the ministries and parastatals easily and successfully.

Public and civil officials engage in nefarious acts like inflation of contracts, ten percent cuts, favouritism, kickbacks, misapplication and outright embezzlement of public funds among others.

The police and other para-military forces, engage in corruption at the Roadblocks and other duty posts. Police, custom, NDLEA and immigration personnel's on duty accept bribe to allow criminals and other defaulters to go free. In schools, colleges and universities, both lectures and students use sexual harassment to get gratifications or pass examination as the case may be. Candidates and students use mercenaries to pass WAEC and JAMB Exams or semester Examinations.

At the Gas stations, dealers hoard and adulterate petroleum products or adjust their pump meters to make more profit. Corruption has penetrated every facet and fabric of our private and public life in Nigeria. Everywhere in the society we see corruption and a general disregard of the rule of law, especially by those whose duty it is to make, protect and implement the law. Public officials are rather interested in amassing wealth at the expense of the masses. This is the depth and ugly situation of corruption in Nigeria. According to Ogbunwezeh, (2005) corruption in Nigeria, corruption has allowed ethical recklessness, and engineered a normative chaos that erodes every sane social value; defiling and corroding social mores with lavational rottenness, (Ogbunwezeh 2005).

CAUSES AND STIMULANTS OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA.

It is well known fact that since independence, Nigeria has had problems of leadership, and the mismanagement of the resources of the nation. Through various forms of corruption, substantial volume of the nation's wealth has been misappropriated and out rightly stolen. In most cases, the stolen monies are lodged in Banks in Switzerland, Luxembourg and various European countries, and other parts of the world. The masses watch with pains as politicians and civil/public officials use their positions to loot the nation's treasury. The result is political and economic crises, hence underdevelopment and national instability. According to (Aluko, 2009) Nigeria, from the twilight of colonial administration kick started a process of social decadence by enthroning the reign of roguery and unvarnished dishonesty. This phenomenon has become endemic. We have tried to identify some of the reasons for corruption in the Nigerian society. Most of the remote reasons are what we tag the

“peripheral reasons” while our novel thesis in this paper represents the “core reason.”

One of the peripheral reasons for corruption in the Nigerian public life is the replacement of egalitarianism and care for one another in society with socio-economic differentiation. This development in the Nigerian society has brought about selfishness and inordinate quest for material acquisition. The desire for material acquisition and class consciousness has lured a lot of public office holders and civil servants into various corrupt practices. The quest for private wealth is said to be the goal of capitalism (Palombella, 1980). Most politicians who seek public office do so with the aim of amassing wealth, through corrupt practices to acquire the necessary capital of the Bourgeois class. In developed western countries, the Bourgeois with enormous capital and wealth seek public office in order to contribute meaningfully to the development of their societies. They rather aim to contribute to the development of their society than to use the public office to amass wealth for capital accumulation and personal economic advancement.

Another reason for corruption in the Nigeria society is the change in our tradition and societal values. Western imperialism, especially capitalism and colonialism have changed our traditional values and sense of respect in society. Before the infiltration of capitalism into the fabrics of our traditional society, people were respected or accorded high regard in society, based on their good character, accomplishments in their profession, as well as, high integrity. Today, people are respected in our society rather because of money, big house, flashy cars, titles, among others, without bothering about the source of their incomes.

Furthermore people of noble profession and high integrity, who are not wealthy, are no longer respected. As a result of this distortion of social values, most people now prefer to get rich quick; even by corrupt means. This situation is exacerbated by the absence of lack of sanctions by both the people, and Governments against culprits of corruption. Nothing serious is done to punish corrupt persons as to discourage this canker worm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of our society. For instance, if a person of no visible source of income suddenly becomes a millionaire, nobody or Government bothers to ask questions or investigate his source of sudden income. Such persons are rather instantly “hailed” and accorded respect by society. In the same manner, when public officials embezzle public money and acquire assets, most times, such public officers are allowed to go free with their loot; they are rather automatically feared and respected for their ill-gotten wealth by society. This misplaced societal value encourages corruption. Ineffective judiciary and corrupt judicial officials encourage corruption, as the judicial system is ineffective

to convict corrupt persons speedily. In most instances conviction is delayed or corrupt persons are allowed to scotch free through judicial corruption.

Corruption also thrives in our society because of the inability of Government to meet the basic infrastructural needs and aspirations of the citizenry. It has been argued that the failure of Government to provide the basic infrastructural facilities like, portable water, constant Electricity, adequate mass transport and qualitative education, force people to resort to unwholesome practices in order to provide these facilities for themselves. Every Nigerian today aspire to own private generating plant, water borehole, Private cars, and put their children in private schools because of inadequacy and poor quality of public facilities. Private ownership of these facilities and infrastructures are hardly possible through genuine means, hence the tendency towards corrupt practices. Civil servants not sure of social security, and their welfare, especially housing and other facilities for their comfort at retirement, are forced to secure these things while working through corrupt practices before retirement.

Corruption has denied Nigeria the deservable development in view of the countries enormous human and material resources. As it is the case, corruption is situated in the structural nature of Nigerian society, and Edewar and Soken, (2002) offers that any country with extensive resources may fail to develop in a way that benefits the ordinary citizens (Edewar and Soken, 2002). That is the case of Nigeria.

Other People Money (OPM) Syndrome: The Core Reason for Corruption in the Nigerian Public Service.

Our novel thesis in this paper holds that the core reason for corruption in the Nigerian public life relates directly to the unitary economic system being superimposed on the Nigerian federation. By this system the resources of all ethnic nationalities and states that constitute the federation of Nigeria are centralized and controlled by the federal Government. As a result of this federal economic arrangement, the resources of the minorities, especially the petroleum oil (which is the mainstay of the country's economy) is being managed by the federal Government in which the majority tribes have overriding control. This unitary economic arrangement enables the majority tribes who have held on to political power to dominate all the strategic and top positions of the federal Government have over the years squandered the resources of the country where their contributions are minimal. Given this situation where the top political sensitive positions in the federal civil service, including the armed forces, police, customs, immigration, and other federal parastatals and Agencies, are occupied by the majority tribes who see the oil wealth as “Other People's Money”. The government

officials in civil/public service, as well as, politicians are therefore inclined to loot, steal, waste, and embezzle the nation's money coming from the single source minorities' oil wealth, considered as other people's money

Since Major General Aguiyi Ironsi's unification decree that brought structural economic unification and unitarilism, both in the military and civilian administrators in Nigeria have adopted fiscal centralism policy in a federalism to provide illegal frame-work supporting the majorities's control of the nation's resources. Since this obnoxious structure and policy was adopted, the tendency among federal civil/public office holders and politicians, have been to loot the national treasury. In most cases, the stolen monies are stashed in foreign banks in consonance with the natural attitude inherent in controlling what does not belong to one. Public office holders are therefore infected with other people's money syndrome to engage in all shapes of corruption.

This infection also manifests in the area of resource allocation and distribution of developmental projects by the federal Government officials of the majority tribe. There is obviously deliberate lopsidedness and discrimination in distribution of developmental projects and infrastructural facilities among the ethnic nationalities and states. While there are high quality and more infrastructural facilities at the cities of the majority tribes, there are scanty and low quality projects in the minority cities. For instance, there is a scandalous difference between the number and quality of roads in the cities of Kaduna, Kano, Jos, Minna, Lagos and that of Port Harcourt, Warri, Yenagoa and Uyo. While there are numerous fly-overs in the cities of Kaduna, Abuja and Kano, built by federal government there is only one flyover in the city of Port Harcourt as federal project. University of Port Harcourt is still uncompleted more than four decades after it was established. The east-west road that connects the minority oil providing states has been uncompleted and abandoned, since about almost five decade. The Delta region where the petroleum oil is mostly exploited is scandalously underdeveloped. This situation and other tendentious arrangement can never allow for unity, true national development and stability.

THE WAY OUT

It is our considered opinion that as long as the Nigerian polity remains so structured, with a centralized national resources controlled by the majority tribes, there will always be corruption, misappropriation of public funds and national instability and underdevelopment.

The panacea to problem of corruption in the Nigerian public life is the re-structuring of the civil/public service including the armed forces to reflect true federal character and the adoption of fiscal federalism which will

allow for ethnic nationalities or States to control and manage their resources. The ethnic nationalities will only make contributions to the central Government in a true federation manner. This is how true federalism is practiced in other parts of the world practicing federalism. The other ailments of corruption identified in this paper will be curbed with the following steps:

- a. The code of conduct bureau and the public complaint commission should be used to constantly check the conduct of public servants. Citizens must despise corrupt practices and speak out against injustice and corruption. The Nigeria society must restore the traditional values of respecting people based on their good character and positive achievement, instead of the recognition based on questionable wealth. A rich man should not be given recognition just because of wealth. A person must serve his or her community or the nation creditably before qualifying for any form of recognition, Award or title. The national merit award should be based strictly on merit not political patronage.
- b. Government should provide social services for the people in order to prevent them from using corrupt means to secure such services for their future. Good Education, health, gratuity, long service benefits, pension, and good housing scheme should be provided so that people will not be scared of leaving their families to suffer after retirement or in the sad case of death. Public servants will be very patriotic, less corrupt and accountable to the people, if they have a sense of social security after retirement or death.
- c. Government should constantly improve the wages and welfare of its workforce. It has always been argued that civil servants have been susceptible to bribery because of poor salary and material condition. Civil servant easily succumbs to corruption as a means of augmenting their salaries. So Government should regularly review workers' salaries in response to changing economic realities to help workers resist corruption.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we been able to identify and make an expose of the genesis and the root cause of official corruption in the nation's public life. We have to start exposing the truth without minding whose ox is gored. Over the years the various works on the subject of corruption in Nigeria shied away from our "novel thesis" in this paper. The earlier we started accepting the truth, the faster we moved towards achieving the much desired but elusive overall development, national unity and stability in the country. As earlier stated, the panacea to official corruption, disunity and instability in Nigeria is the adoption and practice of fiscal federalism.

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