

# CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND PHILOSOPHICAL RESCUE

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## ***Abstract***

*It is widespread knowledge that corruption has eaten deep into the marrows of Nigerian state. It does not just allow development strides to achieve objectives, but twists and swallows development policies, plans, projects and programmes. Thus, abandoned projects and development policy summersault abound in the country. This paper attempts to analyze the causes and consequences of corruption in Nigeria, evaluating the effort of government in the management of corruption from the pre-colonial to post-colonial era. It also examines possible philosophical solution to the hydra-headed national challenge. The paper made useful recommendations to reduce the menace of corruption among public officials and politicians. The Nigerian state needs dedicated and transparent leaders to move Nigeria forward in the committee of nations in the bi-polar world.*

**Key words:** *Corruption, Nigeria, National development.*

## **Introduction**

Corruption is as old as the society. It is a serious vice that negatively affects good governance of any modern nation state. It has been identified as a chronic cancer of the Nigerian economy. According to Abu (2008),

corruption is Nigeria's number one enemy, responsible for nearly all pains that the nation and its citizens experience. It has rendered the vast majority of the people poor. Eneh (2006) noted that countries behind Nigeria in development in the 1970s have overtaken the country by several folds because of its endemic corruption. Onah (2006) noted corruption rubbishes all development visions and programmes through corrupt handling by politicians/bureaucrats. Agbase (2008 a and b) observed that Nigeria mints more billionaires in a year than all other African countries put together can come close to in a decade. A vast majority of Nigerians wallow in poverty and misery in the midst of plenty, squirming under the weight of government of few contractors for the few. Eneh (2011) observed that failed development visions, abandoned development programmes and policy summersault, which are products of corruption and political leadership ineptitude that characterize Nigeria, are common problems that militate against development in the country.

Corruption in Nigeria started gaining prominence in 1976 during the time of Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo as Head of State. A decree No. 11 was promulgated on protecting the public servants on false accusation. This Law prohibited the discourse of corruption against all oath. That also blew corruption among the public officials to a level where it has become a fashion in Nigeria. Today, government does not care to ask of the sources of wealth. Though successive governments had made several attempts to dislocate the perpetrators in the act, there have been flaring cases of corruption by the bureaucrats, politicians as well contractors.

A report by Ekhaton (2010) revealed that bureaucratic corruption is a dominant feature in Nigeria public service. At local level, there were cases of bureaucratic corruption involving all categories of public servants spread over twelve (12) years in four states of Nigeria, namely Kaduna, Kano, Ogun and Oyo. Most State Governors were also accused of looting the treasury of their state. Most of the cases of corruption revolve around

elites who championed the act of corruption to satisfy the individualistic ego for self actualization by the abuse of offices. Corrupt practices can be economic, political and social in nature, and majority of the over 70% of the population of Nigerian people resident in different local government areas are the victims.

### **The concept of corruption**

According to Ekhaton (2010), corruption is an anti-social behaviour conferring improper benefit, contrary to legal or moral norms; and which undermines the authority to improve the living conditions of people. It is an illegitimate way of acquiring wealth. It is a deliberate, conscious and intentional exploitation of one's position, status or natural resources directly or indirectly for personal gains. This kind of misuse of powers by public servants is referred to as administrative corruption.

Basically, the most pervasive problem affecting the Nigerian nation and its institutions is corrupt practices. As Lipset and Leus (2000: 112) noted, "Corruption involves behavior which deviates from normal duties; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private regarding influence." Bayley (1966) sees corruption as particularly tied to the act of bribery. The Asian Development Bank understood corruption as involving the behavior on the part of the official in the public or private sector, in which the officials improperly or unlawfully enrich themselves or those closely related to them, or induce other to do so by misusing their positions in the society.

The Corrupt Practices Decree of 1975 describes corruption by restricting the concept to bribery, which is offer, promise or receipt of any gratification and inducement or reward. The Independent Corrupt Practices (and other related offences) Commission (ICPC) Act 2000 and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Act 2004 broadened the definition of corruption. The EFCC Act empowered the

commission to investigate, prevent and prosecute offenders who engage in:

*Money Laundering, embezzlement, bribery, looting and any form of corrupt practices; illegal arms deal, smuggling, human trafficking and child labour; illegal oil bunkering; illegal mining, tax evasion; foreign exchange malpractices; inducement, counterfeiting of currency, theft of intellectual property and piracy; open market abuse, duping of toxic waste and prohibited goods (Act, 2004).*

From the foregoing intellectual discourse, corruption is the abuse of public office for private gain when an official accepts, solicits or extorts a bribe. It is also abuse when a private agent actively offers bribe to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantages and profit.

### **The starting point of corruption in Nigeria**

Corruption in Nigeria has its roots before her political independence in 1960. In 1950, the first panel of enquiry headed by Justice Starndford was set up to look into the Africa Continental Bank (ACB) owned by the Eastern Region against Nnamdi Azikiwe affairs. He was charged with abuse of office by allowing public funds to be interested in a bank in which he had interest. On January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1956, Foster Juttai Commission of Enquiry indicted Nnamdi Azikiwe, leading to his transferring his rights to ACB.

In 1962, Chief Obafemi Awolowo was dragged to court for his relationship with the National Investment and Property Company, a private company that was indebted to the Western Regional Government to the sum of ₦7,200.00. On June 20<sup>th</sup>, 1962, Justice G.B. Coker Commission indicted Chief Awolowo. Consequently, the Western Regional Government acquired all the property owned by the company.

In 1967, a commission of enquiry indicted fifteen officers for corruptly enriching themselves. The panel recommended that they should all forget such ill-gotten facins to the government of the Mid-Western Region. In 1974, there was cement scandal involving Gowon's administration's claim of \$115 as the cost of importing a ton of cement, as against \$40 actual cost.

In 1976, the review of contract sum from ₦45,216.00 to ₦95,800.00 by the Head of State, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, marked a water shed of corruption in Nigeria. Both civilian and military regimes have hands in one form of corruption or another.

### **The military regimes and legalization of corruption in Nigeria**

Corruption was legalized by military era. The Public Office Protection against False Accusation Decree No. 11 of 1976 was promulgated by the military juntas to prohibit the discourse of corruption against any public officer, thereby legalizing corruption in Nigeria. Gen. Murtala Ramat Mohammed vehemently disagreed with his running mate, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, over his shoddy role in a ₦45,216.00 contract for designing, construction, equipping and furnishing of the international trade fair complex in Lagos. It was also evident that after the demise of Gen. Murtala Mohammed, the successor, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, reviewed the contract upwards to ₦95,820.00 in 1976. Obasanjo regime was also accused of the missing ₦2.8 billion from the (offers of the Nigeria National Petroleum Company (NNPC) (*Daily Trust*, 2012).

The relay race from Babangida to Abubakar transformed into a nightmare of plunders and privileges, wanton stealing and gross abuse of office. This is further confirmed by World Bank (1999).

### **Causes of corrupt practice in Nigeria**

Corrupt practices constitute a vicious circle and it is cumbersome to exactly say who is corrupt; the giver or the taker of bribes. There are so many causes of corruption. They include:

#### **Africa extended family problems**

Onalaga (2002) sees Africa extended family as placing undue significant pressure on the civil servant or politician, forcing them to engage in corrupt and nepotistic practices. Hence bureaucrats and political office holders are forced to exploit their public positions to generate benefits for themselves, their families, ethnic or social cleavages.

#### **Poverty and inequality**

Pervasive and chronic poverty and material deprivation and severe inequalities in the distribution of resources can also serve as a dominant factor of corruption in Nigeria (*Daily Trust*, 2009).

#### **Procedural sources rules**

Administrative procedure in many African countries, particularly in Nigeria, is a root cause of corruption. Administrative discretion granted to civil servants provides them opportunities to indulge in corruption. Red tape, chronic delays, and frequent change of orders compel the parties concerned to make use of money for speedification of action (Ekhaton, 2010). Contractors' payment vouchers are held up by the accounts departments, goods are detained at the various Customs check points, and screwed business is done to grab money. According to Lotterman (2002), bad rules and ineffective taxing system, which makes it difficult to track down people's financial activities, breeds corruption.

**Deviation from norms**

Corruption could be adduced to cultural and institutional factors. There is a link between corruption and culture: “Means ends schema” implies that corruption is at times a motivated behaviour responding to solid pressures to violate the norms, so as to meet the set goals and objectives of the social system. African societies have a particularistic attachment in solving and protecting their cultural values, that spur public or any servants to engage in corrupt activities (Ribadu, 2006).

**Late payment of salaries**

Late payment of civil or public servants’ salaries encourages cutting corners to meet up. Bribery and corruption thrive on the culture of payment delays or refusal for services already done traced to bad leadership (*Daily Trust*, 2012).

**Recruitment partiality**

Recruitment agencies demand for bribe to offer a pensionable or probation appointment to a citizen. Naturally, corrupt recruitment process will likely lead to corrupt practices by the employee (*Daily Trust*, 2012).

**Greed**

According to Aristotle, greed is an insatiable animal. Some causes of corrupt actions may be due to greed (Ribadu, 2009).

**Effects of corruption**

Corruption affect all facets of human endeavour, including investments, economic growth and government expenditure choices. It reduces the rate of private investment in the society. It affects the political economy of the state. It generates unemployment and lay-offs in the public and private sector. Beusal poverty can lead to people continuing to spend what they

have earned, while income doesn't come until a time when there will be nothing to meet the necessities of the citizen in a state. Corruption affects the natural spirit, as it depletes citizen's trust. Both the public servant and politician aim at their interests, and the result of all these is corruption (Transparency International, 2003; *Financial Times*, 1999; Bayley, 1966).

### **Government efforts**

Government makes efforts to curb the devastating menace of corruption. Anti-graft agencies have been established to fight corruption (e.g. Act 2000 - the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission, ICPC; the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC). They have been able to convict public servants and contractors who engage in corrupt practices. Several high profile corruption cases, perpetrators of advance fee fraud, money launderers, tax evasions and contract scams have been investigated and arrests made. Illegal oil bunkering, bribery, looting of public treasury and foreign exchange malpractice have been investigated and culprits prosecuted.

Some statements against corruption by some Nigerian heads of state and presidents include:

“Corruption, inept and insensitive leadership has been a source of immorality and inappropriateness in our society ... This administration will not tolerate kickback, inflation or contracts ... forgery, fraud and abuse of office...” - Buhari in 1993.

“We can no longer ignore the issue of corruption which is now widely believed to be endemic in our country. It is a matter of concern to the government ... government is specifically concerned with increasing cases of white collar corruption including advance fee fraud code-named “419”, bank thefts insider dealings, product counterfeiting and other

### ***Katuka et al – Corruption in Nigeria: Background and rescue***

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infringements on trade, etc. Government is now resolved to do everything possible to stem this ugly development” - Ernest Shonekan.

“White collar crimes, hitherto alien to our culture have become pervasive and invidious... those institutions which we should hold in the highest esteem desecrated and brought into ridicule” – Abacha in 1996.

President Obasanjo took a bolder step by putting in place anti–corruption initiative, including the Due Process Office, the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), the Public Procurement Act, The Fiscal Policy Act, the ICPC Act 2004, the EFCC Act 2004. The administration of President Musa Yar’adua and Goodluck Jonathan at its inaugural speech on May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2009 spoke on corruption, thus: “Its corrosive effect is all too visible in all aspects of our national life. This is an area where we have made significant progress in vacant years and are willing to maintain them. We are determined to intensify the war against corruption, more so because corruption is itself centered to the spread of poverty momentum” – Goodluck Jonathan in 2009.

Also, President Goodluck Jonathan’s inaugural speech on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2011 confirmed his effort to continue the fight against corruption from the agenda of his predecessor (late President Umar Musa Yar’Adua). He has demonstrated his bit to curb corruption by instituting better mechanism and setting up committees to investigate public officials in government parastatals who engaged in corrupt practices. Such committees include those on investigation on pension board scam, SEC, and the oil industries. Basically other institutions such as religious organization, non-governmental organization, youth vanguards have so far joined government in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. The table below

attest to those investigated in the act of corruption in Nigeria – Goodluck Jonathan in 2011.

Table 2.1 shows classified looting of Nigerian funds, as reported in *Financial Times* of London (1999).

**Table 2.1: Classified looting of Nigerian funds**

| S/No | Name            | Amount in London | Amount in Swiss | Deposits USA | Deposits Germany | Total Amt in Naira |
|------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|--------------|------------------|--------------------|
| 1.   | Babangida       | £6.256 bn        | \$7.4i6 bn      | \$2.00bn     | Dm9.00bn         | ₦2.4635tr          |
| 2    | Abubakar        | £1.131 bn        | \$2.33 bn       | \$800m       | Dm16bn           | ₦0.4938tr          |
| 3    | Mike Akhigbe    | £1.24 bn         | \$2.426bn       | \$671m       | Dm900m           | ₦0.8059tr          |
| 4    | Jerry Useni     | £3.04 bn         | \$2.01bn        | \$1.03bn     | Dm900m           | ₦0.8059tr          |
| 5    | Ismaila Gowon   | £1.03 bn         | \$2.00bn        | \$1.03bn     | Dm700m           | ₦0.50176tr         |
| 6    | Umaru Dikko     | £4.4 bn          | \$1.46bn        | \$700m       | Dm345m           | ₦0.89465tr         |
| 7    | Paul Oguma      | £300m            | \$1.42bn        | \$200m       | Dm500m           | ₦35bn              |
| 8    | Sani Abacha     | £5.01bn          | \$4.09bn        | \$8.00m      | Dm3.01 m         | ₦1.2107tr          |
| 9    | Mohammed Abacha | £3.00m           | \$1.2bn         | \$150m       | Dm535m           | ₦0.2107tr          |
| 10   | Abdu Abacha     | £700m            | \$1.21bn        | \$900m       | Dm417m           | ₦0.2107tr          |
| 11   | Wada Nas        | £300m            | \$1.32bn        | -            | Dm300m           | ₦0.2374tr          |
| 12   | Tom Ikimi       | £400m            | \$1.39bn        | \$153m       | Dm371m           | ₦0.25253tr         |
| 13   | Dan Etete       | £2.5 bn          | \$1.03bn        | \$400m       | Dm1.72b          | ₦0.32747tr         |
| 14   | Don Etiebet     | £2.5 bn          | \$1.06bn        | \$700m       | Dm361m           | ₦0.56747tr         |
| 15   | Majjal Mustapha | £600m            | \$1.001bn       | -            | Dm210m           | ₦0.199793tr        |
| 16   | Bashiru Dalhatu | £2.9 bn          | \$1.09bn        | \$360m       | Dm1.66bn         | ₦0.68895tr         |
| 17   | Wushishi        | £2.3 bn          | \$1.001bn       | \$161m       | Dm1.43bn         | ₦0.55649tr         |
| 18   | Hasan Adamu     | £300m            | \$200m          | \$700m       | -                | ₦0.1305tr          |
| 19   | T.Y. Danjuma    | £1.36 bn         | \$1.02bn        | \$300m       | Dm190m           | ₦0.3427tr          |
| 20   | Ishaya Bamaïyi  | £120m            | \$800m          | -            | -                | ₦94.0bn            |

Sources: *Financial Times* of London, 23<sup>rd</sup> July, 1999.

Table 2.2 contains a recent report on corrupt practices in Nigeria as published in the *Nigerian Commentator online*, in its Volume 2 No. 41999. Table 2.3 shows reported corruption cases against Nigerian legislators. Table 2.4 shows reported corrupt scams involving public officials in Nigeria.

***Katuka et al – Corruption in Nigeria: Background and rescue***

**Table 2.2: Recent reported corrupt practices in Nigeria**

| S/No | Name                          | USD \$             | Pounds (250/1) | Total ₦ (150/\$) |
|------|-------------------------------|--------------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1    | Gen. Sani Abacha              | \$56bn             | 10m            | 8.4trillion      |
| 2    | Joshua Dariye                 | \$34m              | -              | 7.6billion       |
| 3    | DSP Alamaseigha               | \$240m             | 10m            | 3.85 trillion    |
| 4    | Custom Account                | -                  | -              | 1.66billion      |
| 5    | Independent Power plant       | \$16.6m            | -              | 2.5 trillion     |
| 6    | Rural electrification project | -                  | 5.2bn          | 130 trillion     |
| 7    | Custom Rev. lost waivers      | -                  | -              | 33billion        |
| 8    | Custom rev. not remitted      | -                  | -              | 13billion        |
| 9    | Police equipment fund         | \$97.25m           | -              | 14.6 billion     |
| 10   | Aviation fund                 | Euro bribe 100,000 | -              | 19.5billion      |
| 11   | Kalu charged for stealing     | -                  | -              | 5billion         |
| 12   | Foreign min diversion         | -                  | -              | 22billion        |
| 13   | Haliburton bribery            | \$180m             | -              | 27 trillion      |
| 14   | El-Rufai diversion            | -                  | -              | 3billion         |
| 15   | UBE scam                      | -                  | -              | 13.3 billion     |
| 16   | NNPC fund not remitted        | \$8.0bn            | -              | 4.5 trillion     |
| 17   | NNPC gas cash missing         | \$4.6bn            | -              | 6.9 trillion     |
| 18   | Federal ministry of health    | -                  | -              | 300million       |
| 19   | Tafa Balogun                  | -                  | -              | 19.2billion      |
| 20   | Bode George                   | -                  | -              | 83billion        |

*Source: Nigerian Commentator online, Vol. 2 No. 41999*

**Table 2.3: Recent reported corruption cases against some Nigerians**

| <i>Honourable members</i>       | <i>cases</i>                           |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Patricia Etteh (Speaker Reps)   | - ₦ 6.28 million                       |
| Buhari Buhari (Speaker)         | - forged certificate                   |
| Dr. Chuba Okadigbo              | - ₦54 million furniture allowance scam |
| Evans Enwerem                   | - certificate                          |
| Hon. Haruna Abubakar            | - inflation of contract                |
| Adolphous Wabara                | - ₦54 million                          |
| El-Rufai                        | - ₦ 100 million                        |
| Senator Mantu Ibrahim           | - ₦ 60 million                         |
| Nicholas Ogbare & Ndudi Elumelu | - ₦ 5.2 billion                        |
| Hon. Bankole Dimeji             | - ₦ 2.4 billion                        |
| Farouk Lawan                    | - \$620,000                            |
| Hembe Herman                    | - ₦ 50 million                         |
| Celesai Ibmu                    | - ₦ 160.2billion                       |
| James Ibori Gov. Delta state    | - ₦ 15million                          |
| Miss Anuka Anyeniba             | - \$242 Brazillian bank                |
| Dr. Hassan Lawal                | - 12.5 million and 15 million          |
| Gov. Aliyu Akwe Doma            | - ₦ 48 billion                         |

Source: *Daily Trust*, June 22nd 2012

**Table 2.4: Reported corrupt scams involving Nigerian public officials**

| NAME                     | POSITION                               | AMOUNT INVOLVED       |
|--------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| Saminu Turaki            | Formergoverno of Jigawa state          | ₦ 63billion           |
| James Onanefe Ibori      | Former governor of delta State         | ₦ 9.2billion          |
| Orji Uzor Kalu           | Former Governor of Abia State          | ₦ 5billion            |
| Chimaroke Nnamani        | Fomer governor of Enugu state          | ₦ 5.3billion          |
| Lucky Igbenedion         | Former governor of enugu state         | ₦ 4.3billion          |
| Nyeso Wike               | Chief of staff to governor River state | ₦ 4.67billion         |
| Rowland Iyayi            | Former M.D of FAAN                     | ₦ 5.6billion          |
| Prof. Babalola Borishade | Former Aviation minister               | ₦ 5.6billion          |
| Bode George              | Former Chairman NPA/PDP chieftain      | ₦ 100 billion         |
| Rasheed Ladoja           | Former gov. Oyo State                  | ₦ 6billion            |
| Abdullahi Adamu          | Former Gov. Nasarawa State             | ₦15 billion           |
| Hamman Bello Hammed      | Former Comptroller General Customs     | ₦ 2.5billion          |
| Mrs. Cecilia Ibru        | Former CEO Oceanic bank                | ₦160 billion          |
| Raymond Obieri           | Former Chairman Intercontinental Bank  | ₦131.8billion         |
| Sabastine Adigwe         | Former CEO Fin Bank                    | ₦277.3billion         |
| Francis Atuche           | Former CEO Bank PHB                    | ₦80billion            |
| Tom Iseghohi             | General Manager Transcorp Group        | ₦15billion            |
| Chief Osa Osunde         | Former Chairman AfriBank               | ₦55billion            |
| Oladele Shittu           | CEO Credence Investment                | ₦139billion           |
| Sunday Akinyemi          | Former CEO Texas connection ferries    | ₦90 billion           |
| Gen. Sani Abacha         | Former Millitary Head of State         | Over ₦2billion        |
| Gen. Ibrahim Babangida   | Former Millitary Head of State         | Over ₦2billion        |
| Farouk Lawal             | Chairman on fuel subsidy               | \$620,000             |
| Bello Tambuwal           |  | 11.6 million          |
| Oke Nwosu                |  | 16.2 billion          |
| Abdulrasheed Maina       |  | Pension scam N273.9bn |
| Prince Njoku             | Administrator of family health         | \$5.2million U.S      |

Source: *Daily Trust*, June 22nd 2012

The list is endless, and should be nothing to be proud of because the above-mentioned persons are whom trust was bestowed upon on behalf of the masses of this country but they choose to betray the trust because of their insatiable quest for primitive accumulation of wealth.

Only a hand-pick of these accused persons were tried, convicted and sentenced to very few years of prison terms. Others are walking on

our streets as free men because of inadequacies of the prosecution and judicial system and/or plea-bargain. James Ibori that was discharged and acquitted of all count charges by the Nigerian Judiciary was convicted and jailed in London for same charges he was acquitted of here in Nigeria. This reflects the weaknesses in the Nigerian judicial system and/or process (James, 2007).

Table 2.5 shows a comparison of corruption perspective indices of selected developing countries. Nigeria (1.9) tops Hunduras (1.7), Paraguay (1.5) and Cameroun (1.4).

**Table 2.5: Corruption perspective indices of selected developing countries**

| S.No | Country   | Corruption perception index |
|------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| 1    | Cameroun  | 1.4                         |
| 2    | Paraguay  | 1.5                         |
| 3    | Hunduras  | 1.7                         |
| 4    | Tanzania  | 1.9                         |
| 5    | Nigeria   | 1.9                         |
| 6    | Indonesia | 2.0                         |
| 7    | Colombia  | 2.2                         |
| 8    | Venezuela | 2.3                         |
| 9    | Equador   | 2.3                         |
| 10   | Russia    | 2.4                         |

Source: Transparency International (1998); *The Guardian on Sunday*, October, 1998, p.25.

### **Recommendations**

Corruption has now become a well organized fame in Nigeria. The fight against it might need to heed the following recommendations:

1. The society should institute appropriate and effective taxing system where everyone is made to explain his or her sources of income; through end-of –year income tax filing.

2. To tame corruption, the society should try to get rid of regulations that are kangaroo in nature, that serve negative relevance to the society.
3. Government must strengthen the institution established to fight corruption. They should have total authority from any authority or any form of interference.
4. Government should take necessary steps in prosecuting offenders as to serve as deterrent for the intenders.
5. Government should accelerate judiciary process for prosecuting corrupt officials.
6. Government should encourage its citizens to expose officials involved in corrupt practices, possibly a reward system should be given to those that have exposed offenders.

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***Katuka et al – Corruption in Nigeria: Background and rescue***

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