

1-1-2011

From Hell: The Surge of Corruption in Nigeria (1999 – 2007)

Segun Oshewolo

J. Olanrewaju

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Recommended Citation

Oshewolo, Segun and Olanrewaju, J. (2011) "From Hell: The Surge of Corruption in Nigeria (1999 – 2007)," *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 1 , Article 27.
Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/alj/vol9/iss1/27>

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Academic Leadership Journal

Introduction

Nigeria is one of the world's most endowed nations, with abundant human and natural resources. These resources are located in all the states of the federation and exist in commercial quantities (see Ajibewa, 2006:261). The proceeds from these resources have been disproportionately distributed to the disadvantage of the poor population while through the paraphernalia of the presidium of government, the allocation of resources has been done to generously favour the ruling and business elites as well as their cronies. This situation has given rise to the grave issue of inequality in the country. The availability of these resources notwithstanding, Nigeria is still underdeveloped; a condition that has largely been blamed on corruption. Therefore, in the case of Nigeria, there appears to be an intricate relationship between corruption, inequality and poverty. However, the universal application of this hypothesis will be a subject of further research.

Ahmed-Hameed (2006:169) observes that Nigeria has appeared among the top most corrupt nations in the world for many consecutive years. An extrapolation from the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Indexes since inception reveals that corruption remains endemic in Nigeria. Although corruption is prevalent in the developing countries of the world including Nigeria, Ajibewa (2006:266) opines that the recent prominence of scandals in countries as diverse as France, Italy, India, Japan and the United States makes the social malady a universal phenomenon. However, the depth of corruption and the degree of its entrenchment in Nigeria has accorded the country a devastating compendium from the Transparency International.

From the Nigerian experience, it appears that corruption is essentially a legacy of the military (see Akanbi, 2004:3). The over-concentration of resources to the centre as against the fiscal regionalism of the pre-independence era has contributed to the surge of corruption in Nigeria. The unprecedented proportion of power and associated resources concentrated at the centre, especially in the post-independence period, was made possible by the *centralist* nature of the military. Akpan (2005:41) submitted that the situation has generated high agency costs that manifest in a number of corrupt practices such as the diversion of government property to private use. According to Adeola (2008:8), corruption has not only become institutionalized but also glamourized in Nigeria as a result of over-concentration of resources to the centre.

Worse still, the restoration of democracy in 1999 has led to an unpardonable height of kleptocracy. Funds intended for development have been diverted into private use by political office holders. Due to corruption, people now view the state apparatus as the biggest industry. Political office holders who are supposed to be public servants are now multi-millionaires who divert the perquisites of office to their lackeys, friends and relations. A spotlight on all the sectors of the Nigerian political economy reveals that the problem of corruption has permeated governments at all levels and thus remains an unholy order in the country.

The government, Spurned by international condemnation and the degrading effects of corruption, has

instituted several measures to tackle the problem. But the monstrous practice appears to have defied all efforts at curbing it. This is because corruption still prevails in Nigeria despite the enforcement mechanisms put in place by the government. Therefore, with this background information, the thesis discusses the phenomenon of corruption in Nigeria using the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index up to 2007. In addition, it identifies selected cases of corruption in Nigeria between 1999 and 2007, explains the effects of corruption on Nigeria's political development, and assesses the fight against corruption within the period.

Conceptualizing Corruption

Corruption, even though a global problem, lacks a universally acceptable definition. The truth is that the concept is multidimensional and therefore no single definition fits all the cases of corruption. Although most definitions of corruption tend to focus on the public or official sector, corruption takes place in all sectors and at all levels of the society (Ahmed-Hameed, 2006:174). To Osoba (1998), corruption is 'anti-social behaviour conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms, and which undermines the authorities' capacity to serve the welfare of all citizens.'

The concept of corruption can be viewed from different perspectives because its manifestation takes different forms and occurs at different levels. These identifiable levels include political, economic bureaucratic and judicial among others (see Igbuzor, 2005:45). However, Ahmed-Hameed (2006:174) observes that at each of these levels, corruption occurs whenever rules and procedures are not followed. Political corruption manifests in activities connected with election and succession, and the manipulation of people and institutions to retain power. It is also the abuse of public office for private gain. Economic corruption occurs when business people pervert normal regulations to get undue advantage or value for goods and services. Bureaucratic corruption involves buying favour from bureaucrats who formulate and administer government policies. Judicial corruption occurs when the courts pervert the administration of justice (see Bailey, 1969:21; Igbuzor, 2005:45).

With close application to the Nigerian situation, the Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Act, 2000 defines corruption to include bribery, fraud and other related offences such as gratification. The Act gave a wide definition of gratification to include among other things the offer, promise, receipt or demand of money, donation, gift, loan, fee, reward, valuable security and property with the intent to influence such a person in the performance of his/her duties (see Igbuzor, 2005:45). This definition covers a wide range of issues relating to corruption in Nigeria.

Selected Cases of Corruption in Nigeria Between 1999 and 2007

Since the inception of civil rule in 1999, it has always been mega corruption notwithstanding the resolve of the Obasanjo regime to fight the social vice that has eaten deep into moral fibre of the society (Chinedu, 2005). Corruption, no doubt, holds sway in Nigeria. Despite the establishment of anti-corruption commissions, the surge of corruption is yet to abate.

In 1999, both the Speaker of the House of Representatives and President of the Senate, Salisu Buhari and Evans Enwerem were forced to resign on account of falsification of academic qualification and age. In the year 2000, Dr Chuba Okadigbo, former Senate President was removed on charges of financial irregularities in the management of the Senate's fund and the award of contracts to cronies at inflated prices. Immediately after his removal, there were calls for the probe and removal of the Alhaji

Ghali Na'Abba, the Speaker of the House of Representatives. In a dramatic turn of event, the Speaker accused the Presidency of giving N4 million to legislators to remove him. Again, in 2000, Haruna Abubakar, the then Deputy Senate President was impeached for embezzling N16.9 million as charismas and sallah gift (see Igbuzor, 2005:46; Alabi and Fashagba, 2010:37).

In 2003, the Ibrahim Mantu led committee for screening political nominees was alleged to have requested N54 million as a condition for confirming the nomination of Nasir el-Rufai. The case was later swept under the carpet. In 2005, the Senate President, Adolphus Wabara, resigned and was arraigned for conniving with the Chairmen, Senate and House committees on education to take bribe worth N55 million from the education ministry headed by Professor Fabian Osuji. In 2006, the Senate ad-hoc committee on that investigated the PTDF case was alleged to have taken bribe from the vice president to conceal the truth on the PTDF stolen fund (see Alabi and Fashagba, 2010:37).

The executive arm has equally not been left out. Former Bayelsa State Governor, Chief Diepreye Alameiseigha was impeached by the State House of Assembly on allegations of corrupt practices, money laundering, misuse of public trust and abuse of office. He was arrested in London on 15th of September 2005 for laundering 3.2 million pound sterling. Not only that, former Inspector General of Police, Mr. Tafa Balogun, was accused and tried of corrupt practices. He was accused of diverting Police funds to buy shares in companies and landed properties in Choice areas in Lagos and Abuja. His successor, Sunday Ehindero, was also accused of embezzling the money meant for the Police (see Chinedu, 2005).

More so, the former Governor of Plateau State, Joshua Dariye, was also indicted and charged to court due to corrupt practices. He was accused of diverting the allocation meant for the State to his personal account. His counterparts in Taraba State, Jolly Nyame and Abia State, Uzor Kalu, had to face trials for allegations of diversion of public funds into their private businesses. A host of other Governors were also indicted for corrupt practices during the period.

In sum, when showing the extent of corruption in Nigeria, Mallam Nuhu Ribadu, ex-Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission explained that 56 conviction has been recorded on corruption, money laundering, oil pipeline vandalization and other related offences while assets well over 5 billion dollars (N600 billion) had been frozen and seized from corrupt officials, their agents and cronies. While in October 2006, he told the British Broadcasting Corporation that more than 380 billion dollars has either been stolen or wasted by Nigerian government since independence (*Sunday Tribune*, December 9, 2009).

Nigeria and TI's Corruption Perceptions Index

The Transparency International CPI score relates to the perceptions of the degree of corruption as seen by business people and country analysts. The score ranges between 10 (highly clean) and 0 (highly corrupt). Going by this score, Nigeria has consistently been rated low.

Table 1: TI Corruption Perceptions Index (1999)

Country Rank	Country	CPI Score	Standard Deviation	Surveys Used

93	Tanzania	1.9	1.1	4
94	Honduras	1.8	0.5	3
94	Uzbekistan	1.8	0.4	4
96	Azerbaijan	1.7	0.6	5
96	Indonesia	1.7	0.9	12
98	Nigeria	1.6	0.8	5
99	Cameroon	1.5	0.5	4

Source: Transparency International (Access Date: 16:08:201)

Out of the total of 99 countries covered in 1999, Nigeria emerged as the second most corrupt country in the world with the score of 1.6. Nigeria was only second to Cameroon, her West African neighbour, with the lowest score of 1.5. Consistently afterwards, Nigeria has been ranked in the infamous club of worst corrupt countries in the world.

Table 2: Nigeria's CPI Scores (2000-2007)

Year	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000
Score	2.2	2.2	1.9	1.6	1.4	1.6	1.0	1.2
Position	147	142	152	144	132	101	90	90
Countries Covered	179	163	159	146	133	102	91	90

Source: Adapted from various TI CPI Score Tables by the authors

Stating that corruption remained widespread in Nigeria, the TI CPI in 2000 ranked the country as the most corrupt country in the world with the lowest score of 1.2 (see Table 2 above). The scores between 2001 and 2007 equally reveal that Nigeria remains hyper corrupt.

Table 3: Score of Nigeria's Closest Competitors

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Score	2003	2002	2001
Lowest Score	Bangladesh (1.3)	Bangladesh (1.2)	Bangladesh (0.4)
Second Lowest	Nigeria (1.4)	Nigeria (1.6)	Nigeria (1.0)
Third lowest	Haiti (1.5)	Paraguay (1.7)	Uganda (1.9)
Fourth Lowest	Paraguay (1.6)	Madagascar (1.7)	Indonesia (1.9)

Source: Compiled by the authors from the TI CPI Tables from 2001-2003

Note: The lowest the score, the more widespread corruption is

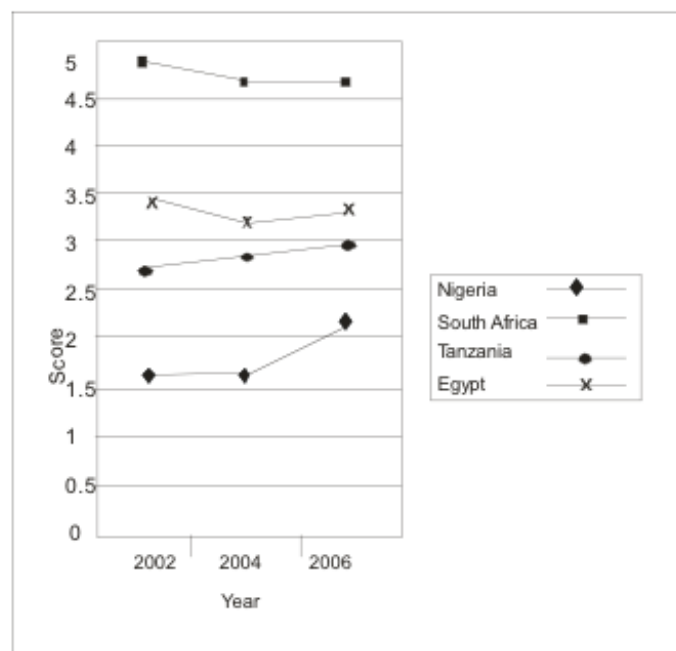
The table above shows the scores and identity of Nigeria's closest 'competitors' in the index, i.e. Bangladesh, Haiti, Paraguay, Uganda and Indonesia. The fact that Asia, Africa and Latin America feature here lends credence to assertion that corruption is more endemic in the developing countries of the world.

Figure 1: Regional Comparison

Figure 1 above is a comparison of the CPI Index Scores for selected countries in Africa. It shows the CPI scores for Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Egypt. Among the countries compared, although none was ranked anywhere near the 'clean zone', but Nigeria came off worst. South Africa has consistently been the highest rated country in the region. Therefore, from all indications, Nigeria appeared in bad light during the period under review.

Effects of Corruption on the Nigerian Society

Corruption constitutes a serious menace to the Nigerian society. It degrades the political culture of an average Nigerian. Building on this submission, a former Central Bank Director stated that the avalanche of frauds and unprofessional or ethical practices is eroding public confidence in the system (see Egbebor, 2003: 24).



Source: The Authors, 2010

The problem of corruption has eroded the moral fabric of our society. The socio-economic rights of the

poor and vulnerable have been grossly violated. The menace has also undermined our democracy, subverted the rule of law and retarded political development.

According to Akanbi (2004: 154), corruption undermines the values of democracy in Nigeria, jeopardizes social, economic and political development in the country. The social vice will lead to infrastructural decay and hamper the goal of national development. In its various forms, corruption results in the malfunctioning of the economic system, which in return results in increasing national debt, failed developmental projects and increased poverty among the people (see Lawal and Tobi, 2003:13).

Fundamentally, corruption has negative effect on democracy and democratization. Corruption erodes leadership virtues such as accountability, probity and transparency. Without these virtues especially in the conduct of public affair, democracy and its sustenance become a mirage. Okoosi (2006:4) states that the magnitude of corruption and the absence of probity, equity and accountability, which characterize leadership and the institutions of government in Nigeria, will make genuine democracy impossible.

Assessing the Fight Against Corruption

When Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was sworn in 1999, he made it clear in his inaugural speech that the fight against corruption will be one of his major programmes. In this regard, he established a number of institutions to combat the menace. The foremost among them is the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission, ICPC. The Commission was established to tackle corruption across all sectors and levels of the society (see Ahmed-Hameed, 2006:179). The activities of the Commission notwithstanding, there were still no signs of improvement in the nation's corruption status as shown by the TI CPI scores.

The other initiatives are the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, EFCC, the Price Intelligence and Due Process Office, the Public Accounts Committee, the Nigerian Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative, NEITI, Code of Conduct Bureau and the establishment of anti-corruption units in within all the federal ministries, department and agencies (see Igbuzor, 2005: 46; Ahmed-Hameed, 2006:179-180).

In assessing the impacts of these initiatives, it is obvious that corruption is yet to abate. Although the EFCC within the period recorded some modest achievements by the number of high profile government officials that were prosecuted, but the manifestations of corruption under the regime of late President Umar Musa Yar'Adua put the performance of all the anti-corruption agencies in the realm of prospective analysis.

In 2007, Patricia Etteh, the first female Speaker of the House of Representatives, was forced to resign for awarding contract at the inflated price of N628 million. In 2008, Senator Iyabo Obasanjo, the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, was arrested and arraigned for collecting N10 million as share of Senate committee from unspent budget of 2007. In 2009, Senator Nicholas Ugbani and others were arrested for alleged complicity in N5.2 billion power contracts (see Alabi and Fashagba, 2010:38-39). The extent of the corrupt practices reported above shows that the anti-corruption institutions in Nigeria have been less effective than anticipated.

The activities of the anti-corruption agencies, especially under the Obasanjo regime, have been criticized. Critics maintain that the campaign lacked seriousness. It was alleged that the fight against the menace was a one-man campaign and that the former president was not sincere with the crusade. It was widely claimed too that the EFCC in particular was used by Obasanjo to punish political opponents. These criticisms notwithstanding, the crusade created the awareness that corruption actually exist in Nigeria.

Concluding Remarks

To win the war against corruption, especially under the present administration, the paper argues that the legislative framework for transparent and accountable government should be encouraged. The general administrative procedures in the country should be reformed. The media should be free from political intimidation and the civil society groups should be encouraged to participate in the crusade. The provision of a decent wage and salary for workers at all levels will also help a great deal. The principle of fiscal federalism should be upheld to prevent the over-concentration of resources to the center. More importantly, the anti-corruption agencies should be truly independent to enable them carry out the campaign effectively.

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VN:R_U [1.9.11_1134]