

Conflict Complexioned By Corruption: The Nigerian Scenario

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Abstract: Conflict has historically proven to propagatetrander tentacles in a corruptionriddled society, by implication, corruption presents a fertile breeding ground for conflict. The ambivalence of corruption in the Nigerian nation has conditioned herwithin the ambience of conflicts. These conflicts complexioned by corruption haveahistoricity that dates back to colonialism. This paper attempts to dot the lines between conflict and corruption, with a keen expedition at highlighting the effects of corruption and its capacity to prompt conflict. In the process, the paper conceptualizes conflict and enumerates the causes of corruption in Nigeria. The paper further recommends ways of discouraging corruption.

Keywords: Anti-graft, Colonialism, Conflict, Corruption, Government

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I. INTRODUCTION

Corruption has produced vulnerable conflict scenarios in the preceding years of Nigeria. Every average Nigerian will certainly have a definition for the word corruption. It is a widely used word in Nigeria, consequently, there a relative revelation of the meaning of corruption to a vast majority in the country. Corruption is not just a popular terminology, it is also a popular practise. From the corridors of power to the low ranks of average living, corruption prides itself as a major bane of the backwardness and underdevelopment of Nigeria.

Governments have come and gone, several policies have been attempted, agencies and commissions have evolved over the years to tackle the menace, yet as the years go by, we get more entrenched and implicated. The brunt of corruption is endless; from poverty to joblessness, low life expectancy, to harsh economic climate for businesses, corruption has demoralised living in this third world nation. The result has been abrewing sensation of conflicts out of major contentious contraptions and minor grievances, tailored towards destabilising and relegating Nigeria to a shameful corner.

The endemic nature of this virus has not just created economic encumbrances, it has also encouraged conflict. The scarcity of resources caused by corruption, crafts an atmosphere of strife, as there is an automatic scramble for the leftovers, by the huge population. The weak institutions of the government watch helplessly as powerful and selfish political chauvinist loot and wreck the system to a standstill, further entrenching the nation into conflicts. Remarkably, no country drives home policies and laws without strong institutions, and where laws are not revered, and the rule of law is trodden upon, conflicts rules the day. This paper reveals the ruthlessness of corruption and how it has elicited, and is still eliciting conflict in Nigeria.

II. BACKGROUND OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

Africa had an identity working for her before colonialism. The pre-colonial identity of Africa was literally divorced from institutional corruption. Colonialism came with a cultural shock to Africans. The mental abuse and dehumanization that came with colonization meddled with the perception of reality of the pre-colonial African. Prior to colonization, African communities had structures of governance that monitored the ethical disposition of her people. Although unwritten, laws were built upon cardinal philosophies of morality, taught and instilled with spiritual connotations which enabled fear and reverence in the people. Corruption was alien, until colonization took its toll on Africa.

Nigeria suffered political and ethical strangulation with the indirect rule of the British Colonialists. Not only was there an adulteration of the traditional standard of governance, unknown and sometimes unscrupulous persons were introduced into the traditional system of governance as dictated by the colonialists. (Moyosore 2015). The channel of reporting and the chain of appointments obtainable in the traditional institutions were resized and remodelled for the convenience of the colonialists. During this course, due process in decision making was cheapened, and orders from the colonialists were revered above established traditional methods of

operation. By weakening our familiar structures to perpetrate their purpose, the colonialists opened a window of corruption. Soon the Chiefs, *Obas*, Emirs better known as the warrant chiefs, and other officers who complied with the colonialists were on the payroll of the colonialists, relatively wealthy, and attaining the elitist social class. Their wealth brought them dignity, and their relationship with the powerful colonialists brought them fame – attributes that the average citizens dreamt of. The struggle and scramble to appeal the colonialists in a bid to be favoured began. People sought to betray current leaders and take their place. Saboteurs took advantage of conflicts to gain power and political appointments. While all these strange and unusual politicking was ongoing, corruption and moral decay was taking roots downward in the Nigerian climate.

Subsequently, political pressure from independence agitators sacked colonial leaders at least physically, but definitely not mentally. Six years into independent governance, as Salawu rightly observed, our First Republic politicians recorded numerous callous trends on the corruption lane. (2007). The widespread jubilation that followed the January 1966 coup d'état justified this. The General Aguiyi Thomas Ironsi's military government attempted a probe of the activities of corruption that characterized some government sectors and arms, as well as key officials of the previous government. This was short lived with another coup d'état in July same year by Gowon and his collaborators. In the 70s Nigeria experienced and unprecedented oil boom at the time, and Yakubu Gowon was Nigeria's ruler. Consequently, reports of wealth accumulation by the governors and other public officials at the time became a major political discourse in the country.

In July 1975, General Murtala Mohammed toppled the regime of Gowon in an attempt to end corruption. He demonstrated passion and zeal in his fight against corruption. He declared his assets and implored other public officials to do same. The Belgore Commission he set up, indicted the Gowon regime of inflating contracts for cement on behalf of the ministry of defence, at the expense of public funds. General Mohammed was abruptly obliterated from power as he was assassinated after six months of stay as military president. His successor, General Olusegun Obasanjo didn't demonstrate the same zeal and passion against corruption, but he ensured a peaceful transition of power to a civilian government in October 1979. (Ogbeidi 2012).

Corruption reigned in the era of the second republic, Shehu Shagari did little to curb it. He was a mild and soft spoken gentleman, and the deputies of his administration took advantage of that. On December 31st 1983, General Muhammadu Buhari led a coup and toppled the nascent democracy. Buhari was popular for his interest in enthroning discipline among public officials, he promised to sanitize the system. Several arrests and prosecutions were made, and in the process human rights were abused and neglected. General Ibrahim Babangida in August 27th 1985 staged a coup, and the Buhari regime became history. Babangida became the longest serving Military President and for thirteen years, his regime perpetrated corruption in all spheres of the polity. With serious public outcry against corruption and abuse of power, Babangida reluctantly handed over power to an interim government which was short lived. General Sani Abacha came into power and the corruption did not just continue, it was magnified. The sudden death of Abacha in June 1998 saw him replaced by General Abdulsalami Abubakar who transferred power to a civilian rule in May 1999.

From 1999 till date, the story has not changed. The mantle of corruption appeared to have been successfully passed down in the course of all this change of governments. We have however seen the establishment of bodies like the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), but we are yet to see a reduction in the rate of corruption in the Nation.

III. CONCEPTUALIZING CONFLICT

Conflict is a prevalent feature of social life. It can manifest between individuals, groups and organizations. Conflicts are basically three types, it can be 1. **Content**; that is where individuals disagree on a certain issue or task. 2. **Relational**; this is a situation where there is disagreement between individuals about one another. It is basically interpersonal incompatibility. 3. **Process**; this is conflict over a group's method to a certain task. (Shepherd 1977).

Conflict is inevitable, and its inevitability is often because of its connection to vital issues that sustain living; like power structures, description of roles, exercise of duties, availability or unavailability of resources, and differences in personalities. The various inferences and subtexts of conflicts are born out of its all-pervasiveness, this has necessitated various meanings of conflict leaving us with various denotations. If the thematic semantics of a subject matter is unclear like it is with conflict, its operational modules become also confusing.

However, when two or more persons have incompatible objectives, and the behaviour unifies with their objectives, but is antagonistic of the other parties' objectives, conflict is in view. This further explains the connection of conflict of social behaviour. Conflict in our context is found within the social sphere of life. Unarguably, as explained by Galtung, conflicts can be as a result of a situation of such as incompatibility, it can also be as a result of attitudes of conflict which includes factors that are psychological, and finally another

conflict dimension of conflict is majorly about conflicting behaviour (Galtung 1969). These dimensions are very interrelated, and we posit that they all occur in the social space.

Political actors and gladiators often fall into the trap of assuming that fundamental discourses of social life are overly theoretical and fanatical. This habit is not only limited to politicians, it is exhibited by some administrators, executives, professionals and some captains of industry. The consequence of assuming that the study and recommendations of conflict resolution is merely academic are often dire for a nation, industry or a person. Curbing and managing conflict repeatedly depends upon following systematic processes, if there is no understanding, they will not be profitable actions. If political players, and all the major stake holders in the matter of corruption understand that some of their actions are major triggers of conflict, and that conflicts are by-products of situations of scarce resources, weak structures, oppressive tendencies, perception of incompatibility, which also has a fallout on corruption, they will be properly guided. In a wrap of this section, conflict is in the overall not entirely negative, yes it is inevitable, but when managed adequately, it has the capacity to vent creativity, production, and relevance in the polity.

IV. CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

We have in a preceding chapter highlighted the historicity of corruption tracing its roots to colonialism. Today, the corruption in Nigeria has however grown to a stage where casting blames and judging history will do us no well. From the highest stratum of government to the lowest ranks of the civil and private sector, the appendages of corruption cannot be overlooked. When a trend stays with a people for too long, it becomes a norm. The consequence of coping with corruption for so long a time as we have already, poses a terrible risk of becoming a part of our normal lives. Today, dealings involving public officials beginning from colossal tasks like national budgeting, to minute ones like keeping a public facility running, there are traces of glaring corruption. The unfortunate impacts of corruption stays with the people of Nigeria. The Nigerian public are the primary victims of corruption, they are not just adversely affected, but are often plunged into conflicts due to scarcity of basic human necessities caused by corruption. There is a scramble by the populace for the minute leftovers dropped by the political gladiators. This scramble often results in conflicts. Limited jobs, limited funds, limited health facilities, limited education, the list is endless. These limits are not natural, they are the handiwork of corruption, and there is bound to be conflict where limited resources are distributed to a limitless populace. The following are the causes of corruption.

1.1 Weak Government Institutions

A great chunk of the corruption in Nigerian is institutional. The corruption in the Police, partisanship of the Judiciary, and the dishonesty of the civil service are a few instances. Weak agencies and institutions of governance does not allow the efforts of hardworking, honest and courteous workers to have impact. The sway of weak government institutions, is reduced motivation and productivity amongst employers. This demoralization is a recruiting factor for corruption, as many well-meaning Nigerians who never intended to be corrupt, are drifted into the ban wagon soonest. Sabotage, impunity, abuse of power, amassment of wealth are all the offshoots of institutional weakness. When this happens, it leaves a poverty vacuum amongst the people, and like we mentioned, fewer resources to be distributed amongst the people will definitely lead to conflict.

1.2 Cultural Factors

The allegiance of Nigerians is often defined around the ambience of family, ethnic group, associations and religious affiliations. Consequently, these affiliations sometimes puts undue pressures on well-placed individuals to share their wealth with them. Failure to do so may lead to castigation and rejection. For these reasons, some persons stretch beyond their limits to get funds to satisfy the yearnings of their affiliations.

1.3 Low Remuneration

The poor economy of Nigeria and the GDP per capita tells on the remuneration of workers. For most Nigerians, bills and responsibilities swallow up salaries within the first week of payment. The reward system in Nigeria is one of the poorest in the world. Owing workers' salaries is a recurrent precedent. With all these deprivations, it is difficult to uphold integrity and transparency.

1.4 Bureaucratic Bottlenecks

The providence of bureaucracy is bankrupt where there are excessive bottlenecks. If registering a company or processing some vital documents will take ages to complete, some workers will find a shorter way out. This short cut often involves the giving and taking of bribe, often for the sake of expedition of processing action.

1.5 Poverty

The government's inability to setup a formidable social support structure has impacted on corruption over the years. The fear of life after retirement in Nigeria has propped corruption at various civil and corporate levels. The government can deal with this by setting up social welfare schemes for the aged. The knowledge that there is a support system for the old, will discourage the amassment of stolen wealth. These welfare schemes can also be extended to cushion the effects of unemployment, and support health care. By so doing, desperate measures at survival will be controlled.

Other factors responsible for corruption can be a lack of patriotism, illiteracy, personality defects, the get-rich-quick mania, greed, lust for power, and wrong attitude towards public funds.

V. CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: EFFECTS AND CONFLICT PROMPTS

The effects of corruption has been sociological, political, economical and environmental. At the sociological front, corruption has destroyed the morality of the public sector and public servants, wrecking their work ethics and encouraging nonchalance. Creativity and hard work which should be a unique sector, has been relegated to the back, because of corruption and the get-rich-quick syndrome. Consequently, social ethics and ethos has been dysfunctional leading to an integrity spongy system.

Nigeria has suffered economic stagnation and depletion of national wealth, which has led to decline in productivity, and a poor GDP. With scarce resources, the government becomes forced to underfund projects which should be capital intensive. It is scenarios like this that has left the Power Sector to remain epileptic, the health sector in shambles and the educational sector grossly underfunded.

The political impact of corruption keeps weakening the nascent Nigerian democracy. From electoral abnormalities, to the undermining of political institutions leading to violence and destruction, politics has been largely played without a conscience by many. What we see is a total disrespect for the rule of law, and abuse of political offices for selfish ambitions by a reasonable number of political actors. Nepotism and unfair structures has kept the system contentious. Remarkably, no democracy strives efficiently within a corruption riddled ambience.

If the social, economic, and political segments of a society are not in shape, it is only logical to find this dysfunctions impacting negatively on the environment. A corrupt system often abhors sequence and due process in the pursuit of environmental protection. In a quest to exploit natural resources, there is a neglect of optimum process, this can lead to environmental degradation. To protect the environment adequately, there ought to be a framework guiding stakeholders, including industries and persons. However, corruption ruins the process, and interferes with the framework, causing a lack of drive for enforcement. In worse scenarios, there is no framework at all to follow.

One major bottom line of corruption is its capacity to trigger conflict within a society. Major instabilities around the world and conflict scenarios have been activated on the premise of high level corruption. Like we saw in Nigeria, several Coup d'état staged in the first and second republics cited corruption as the prime basis. The process of distributing limited resources can create desperation which can be further exploited by powerful figures for selfish reasons. Therefore, we must not allow corruption limit our resources if sustainable peace is our desire.

Nigeria's democracy is still in the process of consolidation, and anti-corruption must be made a major pillar. For lack of an efficient and independent anti-corruption agency, we still find corruption in the corridors of power today. Consequently, there is a circle of conflict fuelled by tantrums of corruption, subjecting the economy to more losses, and further weakening the democratic process. These conflicts sometimes manifests in form of vices like armed robbery, kidnapping, money making rituals involving human sacrifice, internet fraud etc. In any form it shows up, we must note that these vices and those perpetrating them are communicating and reacting back to the corrupt system, they are the impacts and the bites of hunger and deprivation caused by corruption.

In this section, our target is to explore the various ways corruption causes conflict in Nigeria.

1.1 Decline in Production

A direct consequence of corruption on the economy causes poverty across the land. Corruption leaves Nigeria with economic consequences which intensifies poverty, which in turns causes conflict. High level corruption slows down economic investment, alters markets, increases the cost of doing business, and creates inefficiencies and inequalities. These distortions of a smooth flow of economic process, affects the factors of production negatively with loss of jobs, reduces manufacturing, leads to the relocation and shut down of firms. The result is unemployment, loss of jobs, and an undue dependence on imported goods, often very expensive for the local markets thereby widening inequality gaps. At the long run, we see those affected negatively by this tough economy revolting through means like fraud, kidnapping, and armed robbery which frequently comes with killings and other associated crimes. All of these crimes amount to conflict in the polity.

1.2 Undue Taxes And Hurt To Entrepreneurs And Businesses

Payments of bribes required by entrepreneurs to get relevant licenses and permits or relevant services to keep their businesses thriving, affects the profit margins of their businesses. Some business owners and entrepreneurs fall out of businesses because of the harsh business climate. They mostly return to the streets doing crime, or are forced to remain in business as outlaws at various degrees of trade deviance. Example: producing and rendering substandard products and services, which could be pharmaceutical drugs, smuggling, and fraud, in their quest for survival. During these processes, some business owners set up structured outlaw groups, or make alliances with criminal gangs to drive home their motives. Upon confrontation by law enforcement agencies, violence and conflict scenarios are inevitable.

1.3 Limited or Low Quality Public Infrastructure

Corruption has impacted on low and limited public infrastructures like roads, school, clean water, ideal markets, hospitals etc. With poor and few road networks across the nations, the vast majority of those who travel by land struggle for the use of these few and poor roads. In the process, there are conflicting interests and provocative overlaps. Long stretches of road traffic means at the slightest instance, an accident whether minor or major is foreseeable. This manifests in road rage, deviant driving and several other types of conflicts. Similarly, crime is easier on poor roads. Armed robbers and kidnappers take advantage of the poor states of the roads to rob and molest unsuspecting commuters.

1.4 Election Conflicts

Corrupt politicians are always eager to exploit the prevailing ethnic, religious and regional divides of Nigeria to their advantage. During electoral process, some community tensions are intentionally triggered in a bid to either win supporters or scare the opponent's supporters. The average Nigerians suffer the consequences of these conflicts in deaths, injuries, victimizations, kidnaps and fear. Beyond conflicts, we see violence, clashes between political party loyalists, vicious attacks on the lives of politicians and voters, and malicious assaults on properties of stakeholders. A major unfortunate cause of these conflicts is the corruption displayed within the season; politicians are always at the peak of their money laundering activities, as they come with cash in bags, buying votes and attempting to swerve votes in their favour.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS OF A CORRUPT-FREE NIGERIA

Our usage of the term "corrupt-free" is quite literary. Corruption may be hard to erase totally, but it can be kept at all times low. Corruption is massive in its destructive propensity, and must not be handled lackadaisically. Setting Nigeria free from corruption may be one of the most difficult task she would have to face as a nation. This is especially so, when we remind ourselves that corruption is a worldwide phenomenon, however, it can be fought to the barest minimum. Today with the presence of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences (ICPC), there is a tinge of hope. This hope can be kept alive if these institutions are empowered and given the enabling environment they need to operate effectively. It is in view of the above that we make the following recommendations for a corrupt-free Nigeria.

We have highlighted the epoch of colonialism and its propensity at destroying the established traditional institutions that once served as a method of instilling order in the pre-colonial Nigerian society. No doubt, these institutions and values have been damaged a great deal, if not completely eroded. Our first recommendation therefore, is an encouragement of the restoration of the traditional African values true to our culture, identity and tradition as a people. This will widen our choices in the process of disciplinary cases, reward for integrity, and will encourage accountability like we saw in the traditional African society.

In a salient suggestion raised by Tolu and Ogunro, Anti-corruption units should be established in every government ministries and agencies to act as on time watch against corruption. Their focus should not only be on fiscal accountability, but also on managerial accountability, to monitor how managers use public funds and to eliminate waste. (Tolu and Ogunro 2012).

To curb corruption the political class and other leaders must demonstrate political will and commitment. Beyond paying lip service, corrupt officials must be prosecuted and jailed when found guilty. Proceeds of recovered loots must be published and traced to the point of utilization for the general good of the people. This should be further demonstrated in the form of enforcing the rule of law, upholding the sanctity of separation of powers, ensuring the independence of the judiciary and that of the electoral body.

Our anti-graft bodies have over the years been tools in the hand of the sitting government to harass the opposition and those who are not in the good books of the government in power, this has to stop. We must strengthen and fund anti-grafts bodies to a point of independence. Their structures should be built towards independence and transparency

The immunity clause in the Nigerian constitution exempts the President, Vice President, Governors and Deputy Governors from being tried and penalized by the law during their official tenure. This may have been envisaged for its benefits of ensuring that these key officers focus on keeping the government running effectively without distraction, however, it has now become a window of corruption and amassment of stolen wealth by these key politicians. The average Nigerian politician does not deserve this privilege, the immunity clause must be expunged if Nigeria must make headway in her fight against corruption.

Nigeria must also work on strengthening her religious, educational and marital institutions in a bid to ensure strong moral values that will deter corruption. Religion must cease to be a tool of division, education must be tailored towards instilling key values of integrity, and family values must be thorough, promoting contentment and discouraging greed.

VII. CONCLUSION

The global reputation of Nigeria has been smeared deeply by corruption. Corruption is evident in the failing standard of education, decaying infrastructure, poor medical services, loss of human and material resources, and negligence towards the basic needs of the citizenry. Additionally, the poor conduct of elections, the haphazard police road blocks, unwarranted bureaucracies which encourage bribery, budget padding, abandonment of fully funded projects, favouritism and nepotism, all of which takes a toll on the economy, political and social life of the people, has also inspired some degree of conflicts within the nation.

Dishonest governance is the bane of conflict and contention in a society, people will always find a way to react to a corrupt system. In Nigeria, some businesses are reacting to corruption by breaking established laws and producing substandard products, crime rate is increasing, human abuse is intensifying, and there is a sense of urgency and desperation towards survival, thereby fuelling several conflicts at interpersonal and inter-group levels.

Much is yet to be seen from the anti-grafts bodies, while we believe that corruption can be reduced to its barest minimum, and the conflicts that stem from it reduced, we have not been tempted to claim that the possibility of a totally conflict-free society is feasible. However, commitment by the leaders, and a thorough sensitization of the public in a consistent dimension, can reduce the burden of corruption in Nigeria at the long run.

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