

CORRUPTION AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

The concepts of “corruption” and “underdevelopment” are of common daily usage in describing the political, socio-economic, and religious lives of African states, most of which are regarded as either developing or underdeveloped states. Nigeria is not an exemption, as it is often categorized as a developing state.

Adelowo at a recent conference said, “Nigeria no doubt is experiencing a lot of unstable situations, inabilities of all sorts in the areas of economy, politics, education, behavioral pattern, cultural settings, and religions and so on.”¹ These are indices of a developing state. The question is: What are the factors responsible for the underdevelopment of a state? This paper focuses on the relationship between underdevelopment and corruption. Awolowo said, “Corruption had not only flourished but also had almost become an accepted way of life in our society.”²

The Nigerian government got her political independence in 1960. But after more than fifty years, corruption and underdevelopment seemed to be more prominent than freedom and real independence. President Obama, of the United States of America, captured the situation of corruption in Nigeria in his address to the members of the parliament of Ghana when he stated:

No country is going to create wealth if its leaders exploit the economy to enrich themselves, or police can be bought off by drug traffickers, no business wants to invest in a place where the government skims 20 percent off the top or the head of the port authority is corrupt... no person wants to live in a society where the rule of law gives way to the rule of brutality and bribery.⁴

In fact, the first military coup d'état in Nigeria in 1966 was staged with the scenario described above.

The objective of this paper is to examine why corruption persisted in Nigeria and why Nigerians are mired in corrupt practices. Oladunjoye opined that “the country was placed the first position as the most corrupt nation in the world in 2003 and the second most corrupt

country in 2004. By 2005, the country succeeded to some extent in her fight against corruption, moving from the first to the sixth position on the corruption index.”⁵ This improvement was a result of the tenacious efforts of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), under the leadership of Nuhu Ribadu, and of the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related Offences Commission (ICPC), instituted by the government of President Olusegun Obasanjo. Unfortunately, such initiatives are gradually mellowing down. Hillary Clinton, American Secretary of State, alluded to this situation when she observed during her visit to Nigeria that:

The economic and financial crimes commission which has been doing a good job in the past had fallen off in the past one year. We want to see the reinstatement of a vigorous corruption commission. We would like to see it come back to business to be able to partner with us.⁶

However, one of the commissions responded that:

We wish to state that the impression created by her statement that the commission has not done much in the last one year is not only misleading but a contradiction of the records of activities within the same period.⁷

A point of clarification may be raised at this juncture: Why should this paper start its investigation on 1960, where there no corrupt practices in the Pre-Colonial and Colonial Nigeria? The themes of corruption in the Pre-Colonial and Colonial periods have already been extensively studied in the paper entitled “Koinonia and Corruption in the Early Church.”⁸ Thus, this paper will focus on the post independence era, using a historical approach.

The issue of corruption is certainly not limited to African states. Due to the global prevalence of this phenomenon and to the number of studies undertaken to understand it, we do not have a universally accepted definition of “corruption.” There exists, however, some generally agreed conducts that constitute the act of corruption, such as those documented by the United Nations Convention against corruption. This convention classified these acts into four groups: corrupt acts, fraudulent acts, collusive practices and coercive practices. Hence, Eric Ikhilae defined corruption as the undertaking of “corrupt practices” such as offering, giving, receiving or soliciting directly or indirectly anything of value to influence the action of a public official in his selection process or in contract execution. Ayegboyin mentioned several other definitions of the word as given by the following scholars: Senturia (1931), Alatas (1990), Bala Usman’s (2001). He concluded that corruption implies all forms of bribery, unwarranted exercise of power, intentional neglect of a recognized duty, and all forms of favor done with the motive of gaining some advantages.⁹ Furthermore, Margaret Peil categorized acts of corruption into local, moral and social.¹⁰

Walter Rodney believed that the underdevelopment of African and Asian societies is a product of capitalist, imperialist and colonialist exploitation.¹¹ In as much as we agree with

this position in the pre-colonial and colonial era, we believe that African States ought to have changed for the better after many years of political independence. Nigeria, for instance, is still battling with underdevelopment after almost fifty years of political independence. The major problem is clearly corruption. African and Nigerian scholars should not continue to accuse the colonial authorities the underdevelopment of African states. Hillary Clinton revealed that corruption in Nigeria had prevented the country from being admitted as a member of the G-20 (Group of 20, the club of key rich and developed nations). She mentioned that the US initially supported Nigeria's candidacy, but hesitated because of its prevalent corruption.¹²

The issue of corruption in Nigeria will be examined under the following headings: political government, socio-economic aspect, and religious considerations.

POLITICAL GOVERNMENT

The comments of Obama and Clinton about the political leadership in Nigeria in particular and in Africa in general have elicited mixed reactions from pro- and anti-government groups. Clinton said, "Governance has failed in Nigeria."¹³ It is observed that labor isn't working, health isn't working, wealth isn't working, and good breeding isn't working. Only one thing is working: corruption in high and low places with every level of governance, earning good praises for being top of their games. Adelowo also opined that in Nigeria "nothing is working."¹⁴ In other words, many social and economic facilities are not working in the country and the political realm is unstable.

Good governance is a *sine qua non* for economic, social and political development of a state. Alamu defined governance "as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social development."¹⁵ Good governance is judged by the extent of provision of basic necessities of life, like education, health facilities, and other social amenities. It is also assessed by the peaceful co-existence of citizens and institutions, and the equitable distribution of government benefits. Unfortunately, every successive government since independence has been accused of profligacy, lack of accountability, and corruption. Clinton said:

The most immediate source of the disconnect between Nigeria's wealth and its poverty is failure of governance at the Federal, State and local levels. Lack of transparency and accountability has eroded the legitimacy of the government and contributed to the rise of groups that embrace violence and reject the authority of the state.¹⁶

No wonder the militants took up arms in the Niger Delta against oil installations. Even though, the Federal government has recently granted amnesty to those who are willing to surrender their arms, the struggle is still in progress in many quarters.

The military government which was initially seen as a corrective mechanism to the excesses of the civilians has turned out to be even more corrupt than the civilian government. The politicians in the first republic were described as a crop of shady politicians, backroom barterers, corrupt and opportunistic wheeler-dealers, whose chief concern seemed to be self-aggrandizement and perpetuation of power.

The system has not changed in the present. In fact, the Peoples Democratic Party (P.D.P) which is currently controlling the Federal Government once boasted that their government will be in power for sixty years, implying the ruling out of true democracy.

In January 1966, a group of military officers led by Major Nzeogwu staged a coup d'état. He said in a nation-wide broadcast, "we seized power to stamp out tribalism, nepotism and regionalism."¹⁷ The preceding civilian administration was characterized by political disturbance, rigging of elections, abuse of power, riot, arson, murder and looting, that were widespread specially in Western Nigeria. In a broadcast to the nation on the 28th of January 1966, Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi said among other things that "The National Military Government will stamp out corruption and dishonesty in our public life with ruthless efficiency and restore integrity and self-respect in our public affairs."¹⁸ Unfortunately, this government did not stay long to achieve its utopian promise!

In the 29th of July 1966, a counter coup happened and Lt. Col. Yakubu Gowon became the new military head of state. His government went through a civil war under the slogan "no victor no vanquished."¹⁹ Eventually, his government was also accused of corruption. Many government officials were found guilty of corrupt practices. Gowon said that the fight against corruption would continue and "proven cases of corruption will be firmly dealt with."²⁰ Unfortunately, he was not able to address the old problem as he was overthrown by another coup d'état.

General Murtala Mohammed who took over and accused the government of Gowon thus: "it became characterized by lack of consultations, indecision, indiscipline and even neglect."²¹ He went further to say that governors were removed because of allegations of graft and misuse of public funds and widespread dissatisfaction with their personal conduct. In fact, the Soviet News Agency supported the new government by saying "persons who abused their position, who were involved in corruption and embezzlement of state means were being removed from administrative posts."²² Mohammed did not stay long in power because he was assassinated. His brief tenure could be assessed in the words of Awolowo, "As there are good soldiers, so there are good politicians. Not all soldiers are saints, and not all politicians are devils."²³ This paper assessed him as a good and fine soldier. His untimely death gave Olusegun Obasanjo the privilege of becoming the next Head of state, whose tenure was also without the issue of graft and corruption.

Corruption took a new dimension under President Shehu Aliyu Shagari. Some of his ministers were accused of corruption, most especially, Alhaji Umaru Dikko who was linked to the "rice scandal." Many state governors were accused of corruption and misappropriation

of funds; political parties were enriched by governors; election results were manipulated; and some ministers and governors introduced a more dangerous dimension of corruption known as “money laundering.”²⁴ The civilian government was toppled by the military government of Buhari/Idiagbon. Efforts were made to recover some looted property and resources. Many politicians were kept in prison. The military government was also overthrown by Ibrahim Babangida’s government. He ruled for eight consecutive years (1984-1993), before his resignation after a controversial election in 1993, which was said to be the fairest election in Nigeria. His government witnessed various settlements or settling, and advanced free fraud, otherwise known as “419.” He was accused of diverting a 2.5 billion oil windfall to his personal account, as well as many other anomalies.

General Sanni Abacha took over power from Babangida as military head of state in 1993. Apart from the direct withdrawal of funds from the Central Bank and other ministries, his alleged scams included fuel transactions and procurement of fictitious equipment. When he died un-ceremoniously and untimely, he was succeeded by General Abdulsalam Abubakar, whose short tenure was also riddled with several allegations of corruption. In fact, his successor, President Olusegun Obasanjo had to review some contracts that were hurriedly signed at the time Abubakar was leaving office.

Obasanjo clearly stated without any ambiguity in his address to the joint National Assembly of his avowed commitment to eradicate corruption in Nigeria. He said “he was to tackle corruption in government, halt the drift to chaos and breathe a new life into the polity.”²⁵ Unfortunately, even with such determination he was more or less the only voice crying in the wilderness! Many of his party supporters and ministry officials were found guilty of corrupt practices. From all indications, corruption has become a serious issue in Nigeria. Obasanjo, having spent eight years in office, carefully brought the late President Shehu Musa Yar-adua into office because, he was seen to have “performed well” as governor of Katsina state, despite the latter’s epithet as an “absentee governor” that was caused by his frequent medical treatments abroad. Yar-adua continued his foreign medical treatments as president and died after a protracted illness. His efforts to eradicate corruption in governance were not successful. In fact, he admitted that, Nigeria is facing some challenges in its battle to combat corruption and reform in its electoral system. Clinton drew our attention to a World Bank study that reports that “Nigeria’s corruption and related problems had cost the country about 300 billion dollars over the past three decades.”²⁶ President Goodluck Jonathan who succeeded late Musa Yar-Adua has re-affirmed his commitment, determination and doggedness towards the eradication of the scourge of corruption in the Nigerian society.

Nigeria is a great country which was endowed with different natural resources. Each region was blessed by God with mineral resources and bountiful agricultural products. These were optimally utilized by the regions before the independence, because the strong federalism was in place. Each region had control over her resources and developed these in their own pace. In those times, the controversies over control of resources were not yet pronounced.

For example, Chief Obafemi Awolowo the Premier of Western region succeeded in recording many achievements by profitably and judiciously using the revenues from cocoa.

A major problem after independence was the mismanagement of the economy by the politicians, foreign investors and capital lenders. Existing strategic development plans which did not serve the interest of politicians were brazenly distorted and circumvented. Ojiako reported that the Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa had said: "It must be obvious that no Nigerian can be contented so long as any major sector of the economy is controlled by foreigners."²⁷ Eventually, the military struck and took over the reign of power. Decree no 5 was promulgated on the 16th February 1966, empowering "the government to order investigations into accounts of persons where there is a reasonable cause to suspect bribery, corruption, extortion or abuse of office."²⁸ Many politicians were found guilty on this regard.

Unfortunately, instead of achieving political stability and economic buoyancy the country was plunged into an avoidable, prolonged and agonizing civil war. According to Awolowo, "It became imperative to change course drastically, and gear our resources, which for five preceding years had been organized and directed for development purposes, to the unproductive, destructive and unpredictable ends of war."²⁹ Throughout the war period, the government tightened its grips on the economy's financial and commercial operations.

The post civil war witnessed economic and social reconstruction, most especially in the Eastern part of Nigeria. Other states also witnessed the establishment of schools and hospitals. Agriculture was tremendously improved. Most importantly the 'oil boom' era happened. Most probably, the money gained from oil was not judiciously utilized and invested by the government of Gowon. Many of the military and civilian officials were accused of corruption and embezzlement. The subsequent military and civilian governments were no any better. In fact, when Chief Obafemi Awolowo warned the National Party of Nigerian Government under the leadership of President Shehu Shagari that "the economy was in shambles," he was only ridiculed and ignored.³⁰ However, the government later admitted that the economic recession was for real. Some years later the government of Ibrahim Babangida introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), to improve the economy.³¹

The recent bogus increase in the salaries and allowances of Nigerian politicians further drained the national treasury. A publication in the *Tell Magazine*, entitled "Rich men Poor Nation, Politicians' Pay Drains the Economy," stated:

the sore point was a provision that upped a special but undesignated quarterly allowance of each of the nation's 109 Senators from 45million naira to 65million naira. Every legislator in the 360 member House of Representatives too had cause to beam with ease smiles having been voted to enjoy an increment allowance from 27 million naira to 45million naira per quarter. With this allowance alone, which is just one of several

variants each lawmaker enjoys, a gaping hole has been dug into treasury in the current fiscal year, running up to a whopping 93.140 billion naira.³²

The late President Yar-adua expressed his disgust over the national economic mood, which had become gloomy with uncertainty as the impact of the global meltdown reached their territory. This paper holds the opinion that the academic and senior staff of the Nigerian universities, as well as the Nigerian Labor Congress, are justified in asking for increase in remuneration based on the wisdom that what is sourced for the goose should also be sourced for the gander.

The following tables show the recently approved salaries and allowances of the Nigerian politicians:

Salaries and Allowances of Members of the National Assembly

Official	Annual Pay	Duty Tour Allowance	Estacode	Privilege	Other Perks
Senate president	N 2,484,242	N 37,000 par day	\$1,300	Eight Vehicles, Including An Ambulance	To be provided
Deputy Senate President	N2,309,166	N 32,000 pay day	\$ 790	Four Vehicles, including Pilot and protocol	To be provided
Senator	N 2,026,400	N 32,000	\$ 600	Monetized	Monetized
Speaker of the House of Representatives	N 2,477,100	N 35,000	\$ 1,000	Seven vehicles including ambulance	To be provided
Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives	N 2,287,034	N30,000	\$ 750	Four vehicles, including pilot and protocol	To be provided
Member, House of Representatives	N 1,985,212	N 21,000	\$ 550	Monetized	Monetized

Salaries and Allowances of the President and Other Key Members of the Executive

Description	President	Vice President	Minister, secretary to
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			the Federal Government, etc.
Basic Salary/Regular Allowance	N 3,515,705	N 3,031,572	N 2,026,400
Furniture	To be provided	To be provided	N 6 million
Motor vehicle Loan	To be provided	To be provided	N 8.1 million
Deputy Tour			N 35,000 per day
Estacode			\$ 1000 per
Severance Gratuity	N 10.5 million	300 per cent of basic salary	N 6.07 million
Hardship Allowance	N 1.7 million	50 per cent of basic salary	Not applicable
Accommodation		To be provided	N 4 million
Entertainment	To be provided	To be provided	N 911,880
Leave Allowance	N 351,470	N 351,470	N 202,640
Newspaper	To be provided	To be provided	N 303, 960
Personal Assistant	To be provided	To be provided	N 489,395
Domestic Staff	To be provided	To be provided	N 1.4 million
Constituency	N 8.7 million	N 8.7 million	Not applicable

Having seen the bloated salaries approved by the Nigerian political leaders for their own selves, we may now compare these with those of the leaders of the other nations.

Table of Annual Pay of Head of Government³³

Country	Payment
America (President)	400,000 or N59 million per annum, plus \$ 50,000 all expense allowance
South Africa (President)	\$R 1.1 million or N29.6 million, with monthly car allowance of R23,000
Ghana (President)	\$42,000 or N6,216,000
Britain (Prime Minister)	\$262,000 or N38.7 million
Australia (Prime Minister)	\$137,060 or N20.2 million
South Korea (President)	\$217,000 or N32,116,00
Japan (Prime Minister)	\$240,000 or N9.6 million
Malaysia (Prime Minister)	\$65,000 or N9.6 million
Taiwan (President)	\$167,371 or N24,770,908
Canada (Prime Minister)	\$141,000 or N20,868,000

The above figures show that the managers of Nigerian resources were actually milking the wealth of the nation. The figures above preclude other income from illegal contracts and shady opportunities.

RELIGIOUS DIMENSION

There is a new dimension in the history of religions in Nigeria, most especially after the Nigerian Civil War, when several Pentecostal churches emerged. Many of these churches have introduced the doctrine known as the “prosperity gospel.” If Nigerians are not careful, religion also will be sucked into the abyss of corruption. According to Abogunrin the summary of “prosperity gospel” is as follows: “if you come to Jesus he will save you, give you all you want, including good health, make you rich and successful; and free you from poverty and disease” the chief product of what is offered is the “new you”, instead of the “new life” in Jesus Christ.³⁴

Since poverty is seen as evil in these churches, everybody is struggling to be free from it at all cost. Biblical passages are being interpreted to meet the needs and expectations of the followers. In this case, many people are drifting away from the mainstream African independent churches. The way many of them raised money for “God’s work” is questionable. Abogunrin said “You can go to a Church with a car and good shoes, but return home barefooted, and with nothing after donating all the money a person has on himself, he is encouraged to sow seed by parting with his car, shoes, bag and jewelries.”³⁵ There are stories of people embezzling money from their offices and donating it to the churches in the name of prosperity. This same practice is gradually creeping into the mainstream religion because of the people’s earthly desires and tendency towards competition.

Generally, corruption is observed in almost all facets of life. Corruption is seen at the top and at the lowest rungs of the social ladder. Policemen are found on roadblocks collecting bribes, civil servants insisting on being oiled before moving the files, bank attendants winking at clients for tips, medical workers expecting gifts before attending to dying patients, and so on and so forth. Different names have been coined for it: *kickback*, *Ghana must go*, *gbemu*, *keske*, *allawi*, *ten percent*, *brown envelope*, etc. In 2009 the latest revelation of corruption in Nigeria happened in the banking industry, after huge behest loans involving at least five major banks came into the light.

CAUSES OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

1. Lack of patriotism: Many of Nigerian politicians and “big” businessmen and women are not bothered about the future of the nation. They are self-centered and interested in personal achievements.
2. In some cases, unemployment of the youth is a cause for concern.
3. The Nigerian society value money more than morality.
4. The lackadaisical attitude of the government to corruption. Many corrupt officials were set free, even after they were found guilty of corruption. For example, the Siemens and Halliburton scandals.
5. Abject poverty as a result of the socio-economic problems in the country.

SOLUTION

1. The government should empower the EFCC and ICPC to carry out their investigation without interference.
2. Hard work should be rewarded and recognized.
3. The press should be able to expose corrupt practices whenever they are found in the society.
4. The Judiciary should not delay cases of corrupt practices.
5. Religious beliefs should go beyond the foundational interpretation and application of the “prosperity message.”
6. Leadership at every unit or level of government should lead by example.
7. The immunity clause being enjoyed by Nigerian leaders in the constitution should be expunged.
8. The teaching of moral education or religious knowledge should be emphasized in all schools (primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions).
9. The government should also enforce equality before the law and ensure that appropriate sanctions are meted out to offenders.

CONCLUSION

It is observed that corruption has become an impediment for the nation’s growth and development. It is found in almost all spheres of life in Nigeria. There is a need for honesty, patriotism and sincere “rebranding” of every individual for a change of attitude to life. The “rebranding” concept should start from those in government to the common man on the street. The leadership of the country should lead by good example. The government should provide employment and the necessary enabling environment for the people, most especially, stable electricity, pipe-borne water and other social amenities.

It is believed that Nigerians are “religious”. In other words, the religious fathers should discourage ill-gotten wealth and encourage honesty and accountability from their followers. The “true” teachings and interpretation of the gospel should be sought and not mere fundamental interpretation of the Bible that may give room to corruption and other vices in the society. If corruption is minimized to the barest level, there will be a tremendous improvement in the body polity and socio-economic life of Nigerians.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ E.A Adelowo, A Keynote Address delivered at the 2009 NASRED Conference titled: Religion and Sustainable Development held at Osun State College of Education, Ilesa, on 4th August,2009, 2.

- ² Fagbamigbe O, “How the military regime failed to eradicate corruption in our National life” in *Voice of courage selected speeches of Chief Obafemi Awolowo*, vol.2, Akure: Fagbamigbe Ltd., 1981, 155.
- ³ Michael Crowther, *The story of Nigeria*, London: Faber and Faber, 1980, 258.
- ⁴ President Barrack Obama’s address to the House of Parliament in Ghana, Saturday Punch, August 15, 2009, 2.
- ⁵ J.A Oladunjoye, “Chairman’s keynote address “in *Biblical Studies and Corruption in Africa*, S.O. Abogunrin et.al, (ed.) Ibadan, Alofe publishers, 2007, 3-4.
- ⁶ Punch, August 15, 2009, 2.
- ⁷ Nigerian Tribune, 16th August, 2009, 5.
- ⁸ Rotimi Omotoye, “Koinonia and Corruption in the Early Church: A paradigm in the Pre-colonial and Colonial era in Nigeria” in *Biblical Studies and Corruption in Africa*, S.O. Abogunrin et.al, (ed) Ibadan, Alofe, 2007, 594-612.
- ⁹ Deji Ayegboyin, “Corruption an obstacle to National Rebirth: The Religious perspective “in *Orita*, Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies xxxiii/1-2 June and December, 2001, 100-101.
- ¹⁰ Margaret Peil, *Nigerian Politics the People’s View*, London, Cassell, 1976, p49
- ¹¹ Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Enugu, Ikenga publishers, 1982, 22.
- ¹² Punch 15th August, 2009, 2.
- ¹³ Nation Newspaper, 14th August, 2009, 3.
- ¹⁴ E.A. Adelowo, 1.
- ¹⁵ A.G Alamu, “God and Governance: A Christian Appraisal of Contemporary Nigerian Political situation” in E. Ade. Odumuyiwa et.al (ed.) *God: The Contemporary Discussion*, Ilorin, Decency Printers, 240.
- ¹⁶ Nation 14th August, 2009.
- ¹⁷ James O. Ojiako, *13 years of Military Rule 1966-79* A Daily Times Publication, Lagos n.d., 2.
- ¹⁸ James O. Ojiako, *1st Four years of Nigeria Executive Presidency: Success or Failure*, Lagos: Daily Times publication, 1983, 1.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 2.
- ²⁰ James O. Ojiako, *13 years of military rule*, 6.
- ²¹ Ibid., 21.
- ²² Ibid., 84.
- ²³ Fagbamigbe O “Brigadier Mohammed and his team must entertain no illusion as to their instant and transitional role in the affairs of our great country” in *Voice of Courage selected speeches of Chief Obafemi Awolowo*, Akure, Fagbamigbe, 1981, p47
- ²⁴ Deji Ayegboyin, 106-107.
- ²⁵ Saturday, Punch, 15th August, 2009, 2.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 2.
- ²⁷ James Ojiako, *13 years of military rule 1966-79*, 1.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Fagbamigbe O, “The Financing of the Nigerian Civil War and its for the future of the Nation”, *Voice of Courage*, 100.

- ³⁰ Tell Magazine, Rich Men, Poor Nation No 34, August 24, 2009, 37.
- ³¹ Ibid., 38.
- ³² Ibid., 39.
- ³³ Ibid., 41.
- ³⁴ S.O Abogunrin, "Jesus' Pronouncement on Wealth in the Context of Health and Wealth Gospel in Nigeria" in S.O. Abogunrin (ed.) et al. *Biblical Studies and Corruption in Africa*, p. 240
- ³⁵ Ibid., 275.

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