

Globalizing the Fight Against Corruption in Nigeria

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Abstract

Corruption has become a household word in the country. So pronounced has it become that it has been a real source of worry to both the government and millions of Nigerians. Successive governments in the country have put up measures to deal with the monster with little or no result to show for it. This paper is of the strong view that the government should be proactive in the fight against corruption through enunciating credible programmes to combat the menace. It further advocates that the fight against corruption in the country should be globalized since the world now has become a global community where events that take place in one country obviously affect other countries.

Keywords: Globalizing, Proactive, Enunciating, Global Community, Corruption

Introduction

Corruption is one major plague that has been a thorn in the flesh of this country for a long time. Though richly endowed in terms of human and natural resources, the country is rated as one of the poorest countries in

the world as a result of the negative effects of corruption. It is very regrettable that millions of Nigerians live in abject and intolerable poverty, the wealth that accrue to the country notwithstanding. The nation's economy is so unstable and keeps moving downwards on very regular basis as result of unparalleled effects of corruption.

Most Nigerian leaders usually come into office with well-laid out anti-corruption programmes. Unfortunately these programmes never address critically the problem of corruption in the country let alone tackling it. The level of corruption in the country is indeed unprecedented and calls for a holistic approach towards its solution. Perhaps, it may not be out of place to call upon our political leaders to show enough courage and enthusiasm in fighting corruption in the country.

Definition of Corruption

Corruption is a major problem for Nigeria and other developing countries of the world. Even most developed nations of the world are not spared of its evil effects. To define corruption is a no mean fit as it is one phenomenon that has generated so much interest and curiosity among scholars over time.

The New International Webster's *Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language* (2004,p.293) defines corruption as: "*The act of corrupting or the state of being corrupted*". For the *Social Science Encyclopaedia* (1985,p.163-165), corruption is "*the perversion or abandonment of a standard*". Chuta (2004,p.2) clearly asserts that:

The word "corruption" presupposes on the one hand, that in a given system, there is a standard or blueprint of behaviour expected of persons who operate within that system, there are rules or an agreed code of conduct which members are meant to conform to for the healthy running of the system. These guiding principles are constructed around such absolute universal and eternal values such as honesty, uprightness, decency and modesty.

Egbucha (2004), Ekiyor (2005), Ilorah (2004), Agba (2005), and Nwala (1997) all agree that corruption is the perversion of public office

for private, selfish and pecuniary advantage and therefore inimical to the progress and development of any nation.

Corruption in Nigeria: An overview

Corruption is a universal phenomenon and has plagued many nations of the world both the developed, developing and underdeveloped ones. However, it may not really be out of place to state that corruption is more intense and entrenched in developing nations like Nigeria where greed and avarice holds sway. Majority of the citizens see such virtues like honesty and uprightness as very strange and almost undesirable. This point is not lost on Egbe (2005,p.121) when she laments that:

Nigeria is richly endowed in terms of human and natural resources. Yet, she has been classified as one of the poorest nations in the world. What can we say is responsible for this? What can we hold on to as the basic problem? A through examination of this problem shows that it lies in the fact that Nigerians have thrown morality to the wind. Any nation that lacks morality in its code of conduct invites the wrath of corruption. The moral problem of corruption, which is basic, is responsible for all the problems we have in this country. Corruption, in this country, has been so entrenched that it is now a canker-worm that has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society.

Perhaps, Elaigwu's (2005,p.301) observation on the issue of the fight against corruption deserves some mention. Speaking on the issue of the anti-corruption crusade in the country, he wrote:

This has been the brain child of President Obasanjo since May 1999. He made a pledge to fight corruption at his inauguration in 1999. Unfortunately, about five years down the line, corruption has grown up to octopoidal dimensions. It has not been easy to reconcile the rhetoric and performance of government on anti-corruption.

In his contribution to the analysis of corruption in Nigeria, Maduagwu (2003,p.87) notes that:

Nigeria was a typical case of a failed democracy in Africa after several attempts since independence due largely to corruption. The case of Nigeria was especially tragic because, given its enormous human and natural resources; it had, and still has the potential of being a shining example for the rest of Africa.

Egbucha (2007,p. 151) captures the full effect of corruption on the Nigerian polity when he asserts that:

Corruption is a crime against humanity. It has crippled many nations' wheel of growth especially in sub-Saharan Africa. It has come to the notice of every Nigerian that leaders care more for riches than the welfare of the masses. A wealthy nation mean wealthy citizens but the reverse is the case in Nigeria due to mismanagement of the nation's resources by her leaders. It is a situation that calls for reappraisal. Every Nigerian knows that corruption is a threat to the nascent democracy.

It will amount to belaboring the obvious to state that corruption has become the most problematic issue in the nation's history since independence thus stifling her efforts towards genuine democracy and economic progress. It has equally lowered her image and rating in the International Community as she is rated as one of the most corrupt countries of the world. Despite the bitter fact that our political leaders have spent time and resources to refute this assertion, the contrary is the case. In spite of all the efforts put in, in the fight against corruption, it seems to have firmly entrenched itself here to our chagrin and consternation.

It will not be out of place however to state that the greatest acts of corruption in the country are perpetrated mainly by those in government both at the higher and lower levels. It is no longer news that some of our past Heads of State in this country are ranked among the richest citizens in Africa thus casting a serious moral doubt on the genuineness of the source of their wealth.

The necessity of fighting corruption in the country

Since there is a general assumption that what is morally wrong cannot be legally right, there is indeed every moral basis for a war against corruption in the country. However since it is an acceptable notion that any meaningful change must begin from the top, the war against corruption must start from the nation's political leadership for in the words of Okolo (1994,pp. 82:83),

When everything is said and done, Nigeria's as Africa's fate, lies principally with her leaders: the type of people, their lifestyle, values, and the type of image they create for the people for there is no question of changing the society from below, so to speak, that is to say, those of the common man, if little or no changes occur from the top: the nation's leaders.

This issue of leadership by example is not lost on Osudibia (2001,p.101) who is of the strong view that:

The leader is principally a model for his followers. You must lead by example, and if a leader has nothing positive to offer his followers, that case is regarded as inefficiency and ineffective leadership. The result is always low productivity at all levels and chaos.

While it is agreed that some of the political office holders in the country have done pretty well in office, it is a matter of regret that very many others still see political offices as opportunities for looting public treasury thus lending credence to Frantz Fanon's (1968,p.165) assertion on the level of corruption of African leaders that:

These so-called leaders would erect grandiose buildings in the capital and squander the nation's money on what they regard as monuments.

It will not be out of place to point out that any fight against corruption that do not include plausible measures that will tackle the high incidence of poverty in the country will definitely not work. This is obviously true for according to Jega (2007,p.201), "*The pervasive problem of poverty is the most important challenge that has to be concretely and creatively addressed*". The issue of poverty is made worse when the political class

indulges in the brazen plundering of the collective wealth of the nation. In the words of Okolo (1993,p.19):

It is this narrow, selfish perspective of Nigerians which we have seen to be essentially materialistic that makes politics in Nigeria a private gamble and not a service for the nation, a theatre for competing selfish interests where the common good is often carted away as private property by individual politicians or groups.

The need to globalize the fight against corruption in the country

Globalization is one political phenomenon that has critically aroused the interest of scholars for some time now. The Academic's Dictionary of Political Science (2006,p.132) gives a real insight into the meaning of globalization. It states that:

The notion that the world has so shrunk through expanded contacts and the spread of mass media that it now resembles a village. Everybody knows what everybody else is doing, and the actions of one inhabitant can affect the lives of many others.

Corruption is indeed a widespread phenomenon in contemporary societies and most scholars especially from Third World countries, see it as one of the most profound and vicious obstacles to the economic development and political integration of these countries. Anjov (2006,p.179), Shishima and Apenda (2004,p.17), Nyitor (2006,p.267) and Okoro (2006:286) all allude to this fact. Corruption is indeed a universal phenomenon and it is not peculiar to any country or continent at all.

That corruption has reached an alarming level in the country is no longer news. Perhaps it can be said with some level of certainty that no other country in the continent of Africa has devoted more attention, energy and resources to containing the evil effects of corruption more than Nigeria. Unfortunately for the nation, the more it battles this cankerworm called corruption, the more it manifests itself brazenly on the social, economic and political spheres of the nation. There seem to be no end in sight for this obnoxious virus that has held the nation hostage for a very long time.

There is therefore the dire need for the nation to recorder its priorities and also change its tactics in the fight against corruption if it hopes to succeed in the onerous task of fighting corruption to a standstill and bringing it to its knees. There is perhaps no doubt that every incoming administration in Nigeria has a strong and uncommon passion and desire to fight corruption in the country. Unfortunately and regrettably too, this passion and zeal fizzles out sooner than later due to crass ignorance of ways of going about this fight.

It is therefore of utmost importance that the fight against corruption in the country be globalized. The reason for this suggestion is not far-fetched. The world has indeed become a global village of late and what happens in one country obviously affects other countries as well. Most of the nation's corrupt political office holders and senior civil servants who embezzle the nation's wealth do not bank their loot in our local banks here but stash them away in foreign banks notably in Europe and America where it becomes difficult if not impossible to trace let alone recover. The Federal Government should therefore engage these countries in serious diplomatic dialogues towards recovering the nation's monumental wealth in these foreign vaults.

Government can also hire financial experts in these countries who can help track the nation's wealth stashed in these foreign banks with a view to recovering them. While the government of Olusegun Obasanjo, the former president of this country deserve some praise for the monies it recovered from some of our past political leaders that has been repatriated from some foreign countries, it is of utmost importance to state that a lot of the nation's wealth illegally siphoned are still hanging out there in these foreign banks and no effort should be spared in recovering them. Our anti-graft agencies notably the Economic and financial crimes commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) should also collaborate with their foreign counterparts' in terms of seeking assistance towards the success of their herculean responsibilities, since they cannot operate in isolation and expect to achieve meaningful results.

The Federal Government should also launch an international moral crusade to dissuade these foreign banks from accepting the nation's collective wealth that are looted by political leaders for banking in their banks. While it may be agreed that these banks exist purely for business just like banks in other parts of the world, it is morally wrong for them to destabilize and indeed stifle the economies of other countries by aiding and abating corruption in such countries through the tacit encouragement of money laundering by citizens of these countries.

While many of these countries see themselves as moral crusaders and agents of change in the universal fight against corruption, it will be morally wrong for banks in their countries to accept and bank ill-gotten monies from Third World countries in general and Nigeria in particular as this will definitely retard development and progress in these countries. When banks in the developed countries start rejecting ill-gotten monies from Nigeria and other less-developed nations of the world, it will surely mark a new dawn in the fight against corruption in the country.

Conclusion

Many scholars including Ayua (2001), Okpeh (2008), Otite (1996), Orngu (2006) and Aghamelu (2006) all agree that corruption is evil and retrogressive. Though the scourge of corruption has a universal acclaim, it is a worrying fact that its prevalence and stubborn persistence in Nigeria has assumed a disturbing dimension. Corruption has reached such a dangerous level in the country and the most disturbing aspect is that all efforts so far made to curtail its menace seem too idealistic and cosmetic to achieve any realistic and meaningful result.

Perhaps it is instructive to point out here that one of the greatest drawbacks in the nation's quest to fight corruption is the inability of her leaders to lead by example. It becomes a travesty of justice when some of our political leaders who are manifestly corrupt become the arrow-heads of the fight against corruption in the country. It is therefore pertinent to point out that if the war against corruption is to be won, Nigerian political leaders must lead by example and not necessarily by unnecessary precepts and

rhetoric since it is widely acknowledged that example is better than precept. Any government that is willing and ready to fight corruption must not harbour corrupt officials no matter how highly placed they are. The interests and well-being as well as development of the country should take precedence over and above the chauvinistic and egoistic interests of some selfish and self-serving individuals in power.

Since corruption is a global phenomenon, the Federal Government through the various anti-graft agencies should under-study other countries of the world that have succeeded in waging successful wars against the scourge to enable them understand how such nations were able to fight corruption to a standstill in their countries. They may adopt such measures, though with some modifications to suit our own situation and environment. If this nation must develop and progress, the issue of globalizing the fight against corruption must be expedited. Not to do this will surely amount to postponing the evil day for in the words of Omoregbe (1993,p. x):

An immoral society is also a sick society. By an immoral society we mean a society permeated with corruption, dishonesty, fraud, selfishness, embezzlement of public funds and other immoral acts. Such a society is sick and cannot be in sound order. Its organs cannot function properly because they are not in sound health conditions. Life in such a society becomes increasingly difficult, insecure and unhappy. Something has to be done to save the situation.

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