

THE NIGERIAN YOUTH AND THE ALBATROSS CALLED CORRUPTION

(Being a paper delivered by Obinna Akpuchukwu, Esq¹ at the One day Anti-Corruption Conference organized by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) NYSC Yenagoa Bayelsa State CDS Group on Friday the 18th of September, 2015 at the Prof. Steve Azaiki Public Library, Imgbi Road, Yenagoa Bayelsa State Nigeria).

INTRODUCTION:

The term “corruption” has in recent times been on the lips of many Nigerians. This is largely due to the key mantra under which the incumbent administration at the federal level rode into power. Interestingly, the Youth have been the greatest singers of the “kill corruption” song, perhaps due to the fact that they have realized that they are the worst hit by that deadly monster. But who exactly is a youth? And what exactly is “corruption”? We shall attempt to give a working definition of these two terms so as to have a clearer picture of the topic of discourse.

“Youth” is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. Youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group.

However, age is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to education and employment. Therefore, “Youth” is often indicated as a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds his/her first employment. This latter age limit has been increasing, as higher levels of unemployment and cost of setting up an independent household puts many young people into a prolonged period of dependency.

When carrying out its Youth Strategy, UNESCO uses different definitions of youth depending on the context.

For activities at international or at regional level, such as the African Youth Forum, UNESCO uses the United Nations' universal definition.

The UN, for statistical consistency across regions defines "Youth", as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by member states. All UN statistics on youth are based on this definition, as illustrated by the annual yearbooks of statistics published by the United Nations system on demography, education, employment and health.

For activities at the national level, for example when implementing a local community youth programme, "Youth" may be understood in a more flexible manner. For instance, according to the African Youth Charter, "youth" means "every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years"² In Nigeria, the age of a youth is often put at 18-35 years.³

"Corruption" on the other hand is defined as the misuse of entrusted power or the dishonest use of one's office or position for personal gain.⁴

The World Bank defines corruption as the abuse of public office for private gains. Public office is abused for private gains when an official accepts, solicits, or extorts a bribe. It is also abused when private agents actively offer bribe to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit. Note that public office can also be abused for personal benefits even if no bribery occurs, through patronage and nepotism, the theft of state assets or the diversion of state resources.

According to the Blacks Law Dictionary⁵ corruption means:

“Depravity, perversion, or taint, impairment of integrity, virtue, or moral principles, especially the impairment of a public official duties by bribery”.

A recurrent decimal running through all definitions of corruption we have so far given is the term “bribe”. But, what exactly is a bribe? The same Blacks Law Dictionary⁶ gives its meaning as:

“A price, reward, gift or favour bestowed or promised with a view to pervert the judgment or influence the action of a person of trust.

*“The core concept of a bribe is an inducement improperly influencing the performance of a public function meant to be gratuitously exercised”.*⁷

FORMS OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

Many agree that corruption is a cancerous global phenomenon, which has continued to cripple the developmental efforts of Nigeria. It is estimated that corruption drains African countries more than US\$140 billion yearly.⁸ Corruption in Nigerian is perpetrated through different forms, ranging from acceptance of gratification, succumbing to inducement; embezzlement; conflict of interests, for example, the award of contracts by public office holders to cronies, family members, personally held companies; bribery; fraud; nepotism, conversion of public funds for personal gains, payment for favorable judicial decisions, etc.⁹

EXTANT PROVISIONS OF SOME NIGERIAN LAWS ON CORRUPTION

Some Nigerian legislation have criminalized certain actions which within the context of our above working definition, can be tagged as corruption.

The Criminal Code Act¹⁰ made some copious provisions relating to corruption and abuse of office. These are found in Chapter 12 of the said legislation. Keeping in

mind the scope of my paper, I shall cite only a few sections without quoting their provisions verbatim viz:

Section 98- Official Corruption: Public official inviting bribes, etc, on account of own action

Section 98A- Official Corruption: Persons giving bribes, etc, on account of actions of public official

Section 99- Extortion by public officers

Section 104- Abuse of office.

In the same vein, apart from defining corruption in its section 2, the Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Act¹¹ made copious provisions on some offences that can safely be called corruption. These can be found in Section 12 to 29 of the Act. Other corruption related offences can be found in the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act, 2004 and the Money Laundry (Prohibition) Act, 2011.

EFFECTS OF CORRUPTION ON THE NIGERIAN YOUTH

Although corruption is no respecter of persons, age or racial background, the Nigerian Youth have been the worst hit by the ravaging menace of corruption. It is admitted that the effects of corruption in Nigeria are multifarious. However, we shall consider some ways through which corruption directly affects the Nigerian Youth.

a. UNEMPLOYMENT

Corruption, which has permeated the entire social structure of Nigeria, has robbed the country of developing a vibrant economic base. Funds meant for development projects have been misappropriated, diverted, or embezzled and stashed away in foreign banks, while incompetent and corrupt bureaucrats and administrators in the public enterprises and parastatals have liquidated these

organizations.¹² The point being made here is that the collaborations of the political elite, local and foreign contractors in the inflation of contract fees have robbed Nigeria of the chances of using more than \$500 billion estimated revenue from the oil sale in the last 50 years to develop a vibrant economy that would have created jobs for the youth in various sectors of the economy. The ruling (political) class failed because they replaced the vision, policy strategy, which should be the trust of every leadership with transaction (contract awards and other mundane money-related activities) as each successive government took turns to prey on the nation's wealth, by using public power, resources, goodwill, utilities, instruments of abuse and personal gains. Thus, crippling the economy and engendering and exacerbating unemployment which creates abject poverty, hunger and frustration.

THE GHOST-WORKER PHENOMENON

Greatly contributing to the high rate of unemployment among the Nigerian Youth is the ghost-worker syndrome. This is a practice where the management of a public organization deliberately inflates the payroll by including fictitious names to get more subventions for salary. The excess is syphoned by the members of management in connivance with some members of governing council or boards.¹³

The implication of this is that some certain old men and women in public service collect their own salaries and that of some other non-existent fellows, whereas the able-bodied Nigerian Youth languish under the excruciating scourge of unemployment. The Youth who are supposed to actually work and earn these salaries siphoned by public servants under this ghost worker syndrome roam about the streets in search of jobs. The number of ghost-workers in Nigeria, both at Federal and State level is estimated to be over 300,000. In February this year, it was reported by Punch Newspaper¹⁴ that the Federal Government has uncovered 62,892 ghost-workers in its employ, from which the government has been able to save over #208.7 billion. In Kebbi state, its 9, 300, in Zamfara, 7,000¹⁵ and in Imo state, its over 3000. No state is spared of this.

b. JOB RACKETEERING

Another negative effect of corruption on the Nigerian Youth is the malaise of job racketeering. This is a situation where jobs are sold out to the highest bidder instead of being based on merit. The Nigerian youth have completely lost faith in the transparency of employment into the civil/public service. Thus, the average Nigerian Youth who expresses desire to apply for job in any government ministry, department or agency, is greeted with the popular cliché “you sabi person for there? You get link to the job? You get connection to the job?” etc. The unfortunate implication of this is that the Nigerian Youth who cannot pay the very huge sums often demanded by these racketeers would lose out from those jobs.

On May 22, 2015, it was reported by Sahara Reporters¹⁶ that the then governor of Delta state, Dr Emmanuel Uduaghan suspended the chairman and members of the State Civil Service Commission (CSC). The CSC members had allegedly been selling civil service jobs for a whopping sum of #1.5m each. The racket was carried out using a Senior Administration Officer, Eboh Goddey Oghero’s Fidelity Bank account to make deposits.

Earlier in the same month of May, the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) arraigned one Ahmed Abdul, a former prison officer of the Nigerian Prison Service over job racketeering. He was accused of collecting #250, 000 from one Adamu Abubakar to help him secure employment with the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) sometime in July, 2014. Incidences of job racketeering in the public sector are legion. We have only selected these two to drive home our point.

STRATEGIES FOR CURBING CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA

It is not that corruption has not been recognized as the “enemy within”, it is, however, that the political will to begin to tackle this problem in Nigeria has been non-existent except for the Buhari/Idiagbon Regime (1984-1985) and the current

government that has so far shown tell-tale signs of willingness to combat the scourge. We however advocate the following steps/strategies towards eradicating corruption in Nigeria.

1. Nigerian government should take the issue of corruption seriously by empowering the anti-graft agencies to prosecute those involved in corrupt practices in the country.
2. The government should appoint only honest and transparent persons to key positions in the country.
3. The judiciary should be empowered and criminal procedure laws reviewed to ensure that all cases involving corruption are handled and treated seriously with speed.
4. All men must be treated as equals before the law. No person should be clothed with politically-engineered immunity from corruption charges. And a situation where a person is convicted for stealing billions of Naira meant for pension but asked to pay a paltry sum of money as fine is most unfortunate and should be avoided, if we must win this fight against corruption.
5. We must all think Nigeria first and have a one Nigeria mentality. Thus, we should not kick against the prosecution of some perceived corrupt persons because they are from our state or region or town.

CONCLUSION:

My final word to everyone here is to carry out the anti-corruption campaign first internally, then in our homes and places of work, before we attempt to change the entire Nigerian Society. We must heed to the latin expression *bonum est faciendum et prosequendum et malum vitandum*, which means “the good is to be done and pursued, and evil avoided”. This is the first precept of Natural Law, which means, as St Thomas Aquinas held, it need not be further reduced or explained, because it is self-evident to any thinking person. Corruption is evil, let us avoid it.

Thank you!

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