

# **Leadership Crisis and Corruption in Contemporary Nigeria: Implications for National Development**

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## **Abstract**

Considering the enormity of material and human endowment in Nigeria, the country's development in all facets has been less than inspiring. More benign is the way in which less endowed countries far below the level of development achieved at independence by Nigeria have attained far higher levels of development way beyond Nigeria. This low level of development is blamed on the prevalence of grand corruption that has been an undeniable part of the country's history. With the Nigerian Military consumed by the very monster it sought to address, it was time to return to democracy in 1999. While democratic institutions are central to the efficient running of government, exemplary political leadership is key to the functional efficiency of any democracy. Again, unfortunately, political leadership was steeped in moral crisis and failed to rise above corruption and has rather accentuated it since 1999. This is evidenced by the rising profile of Nigeria on the global corruption index on an annual basis from 2000-2014. To break the cycle of grand corruption, the people must regain the power to exercise choice of leadership in a fair and credible election. Until an exemplary political leader emerges to drive the democratic project, it may be a long way off for the country to reduce corruption and achieve commensurate development.

**Key words:** leadership crisis, corruption, democracy, development

## **1. Crise de gouvernance et corruption dans le Nigeria contemporain: implications pour le développement national**

### **Résumé**

Compte tenu de l'énormité du matériel et de la dotation humaine au Nigeria, le développement du pays dans tous les aspects a été moins inspirant. Plus bénigne est la façon dont les pays moins nantis bien en dessous du niveau de développement atteint à l'indépendance par le Nigeria, ont atteint des niveaux beaucoup plus élevés de développement au-delà du Nigeria. Ce faible niveau de développement est attribué à la prévalence de la grande corruption qui a été une partie indéniable de l'histoire du pays. Avec l'armée nigériane consommée par le monstre même, elle a cherché à répondre, il était temps de revenir à la démocratie en 1999. Alors que les institutions démocratiques sont au cœur du fonctionnement efficace du gouvernement, l'exemplaire des dirigeants politiques est la clé de l'efficacité fonctionnelle de toute démocratie. Encore une fois, malheureusement, les dirigeants politiques ont été ancrés dans la crise morale et n'ont pas réussi à

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s'élever au-dessus de la corruption et l'ont plutôt accentué depuis 1999. Cela est attesté par l'importance croissante du Nigeria sur l'indice global de la corruption sur une base annuelle de 2000 à 2014. Pour briser le cycle de la grande corruption, le peuple doit reprendre le pouvoir d'exercer le choix de la direction lors d'une élection juste et crédible. Jusqu'à ce qu'un dirigeant politique exemplaire émerge à conduire le projet démocratique, ce serait un long chemin pour réduire la corruption hors du pays et parvenir à un développement proportionnel.

**Mots clés:** crise de gouvernance, la corruption, la démocratie, le développement

## **Introduction**

Nigeria is mired in a political leadership crisis and the signs are palpable. The country's sixteen years of democratic rule (1999-2015) are characterized by the conduct of public officials that take the forms of corruption and violence (HRW, 2002). For instance many elected political leaders since 1999 "obtained their positions by demonstrating an ability to use corruption and political violence to prevail in sham elections" (HRW, 2007, P.2). The 2003 and 2007 General Elections were systematically rigged. Indeed, the 2007 exercise was described as the worst ever in the country's history (ICG, 2007). This much was acknowledged by President Umaru Yar'Adua at his inauguration with a promise to reform the country's electoral process. In place of democratic competition, the contest for political office has been turned into a war of sort and waged violently by armed gangs recruited by politicians (Genyi, 2012). It appears that winning elections in Nigeria has become dependent upon how deep one is with corruption and organized violence.

Having entrenched the use of electoral violence as a means to occupy public office, grand corruption and mismanagement have thus been elevated to an official outlet of waste of public resources for private ends. The last 16 years have been characterized by waste of record-setting oil revenues crucial for financing the expansion and improvement of access to health, education and roads and power infrastructure. Indeed properly managed, public resources would have led to poverty reduction if not overall inequality. But grand corruption in its monumental and highest scale witnessed in Nigeria in contemporary times rather blossomed due to a climate of impunity (HRW, 2007). Violence, corruption and impunity such that have been witnessed in the last 16 years are systemic ills that derived from governmental institutions that have responsibility for dealing with these same abuses.

The consistent systematization of grand corruption and mismanagement has led to the loss of the argument that these are products of long military rule and would disappear with the consolidation of democracy. This is simply and squarely the crisis of political leadership. The way in which political leaders emerge in Nigeria robs the process of objectivity and scrutiny to throw up conscientious, focused and visionary individuals. That is why 'godfathers' have emerged in place of the "people" to select leaders and impose them on Nigerian society. Right across the country, political godfathers have established control over individuals that depended on their sponsorship and protection to win 'elections'. In return the godfathers seize government institutions to serve their personal rather society's interests. From the presidency to state governors, the country is steeped in political leadership crisis that has continued to furnish the ends of corruption and public malfeasance to the detriment of national development. For instance, Nigeria earned \$223 billion during the eight years of President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration

and is reported to have lost \$4billion - \$8billion annually due to corruption. The result is poor health statistics, dilapidated road networks, epileptic electricity supply and worsening poverty (HRW, 2007).

This paper argues that a visionary and exemplary political leadership is crucial to the attainment of national development in Nigeria. It is the leadership crisis that has led to the inability of the country to enjoy the services of an exemplary political leader that is responsible for not only the abysmal low but deteriorating level of national development in Nigeria. To demonstrate this causal linkage the paper opens with the first section on introductory remarks to be followed by a conceptual exploration on political leadership and corruption in the second section. The vivid display of the interconnection between weak political leadership and corruption is pursued in section three while section four illustrates the impact of corruption on national development. Section five is the conclusion that ties the policy options.

### **Leadership and Corruption: Conceptual and Theoretical Notes**

Leadership is as old as human society. It is ubiquitous and inescapable. Leadership is found where ever there is a group. The presence and effectiveness of any leadership is critical to the functionality of the group in terms of realizing its set goals. Considered at an expanded level of society Edinger (1967, p.8) conceives leadership as a “position within a society which is defined by the ability of the incumbent to guide and structure the collective behavior patterns of some or all of its members”. Leadership is seen to be relational, interpersonal and rest on inequality of influence between the leader and the followers. Emphasizing the influential capacity of leadership Durns (1978, p.30) defines leadership as “the inducement of followers by the leader to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations, the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectation of both leader and followers”. Still with emphasis on influence Ubegbe (1999, p. 283) defines leadership as a “process of creating the subordinates’ identification with the group’s mission and creating their desires to achieve the group’s goals”.

Leadership therefore involves the leader, followers and circumstances. The intricate relationship between these elements underscores the political nature of leadership. Emphasis here therefore is on political leadership that employs power to influence the conduct of followers towards the attainment of given objectives. This can be viewed as a process of human interaction that allows others to exert influence on others. In most circumstances one individual does this in a consistent manner by shaping the nature and direction of a group activity (Kellerman, 1984). This is political leadership typified and expressed as a phenomenon of power by the ability of the leader to persuade and compel compliance. To this extent Bastol and Chong-Do (1983) conceives political leadership in its role of mobilization and direction by leaders using essentially non-coercive means on followers to act in a regulated, patterned and coherent ways that result in change in the authoritative allocation of values for a society. Political leadership connotes power itself used to shape society’s destiny in negative or positive ways (Mangu, 2000). The essence of leadership is to persuade others to comply using non-coercive means mostly.

Political leadership is considered paramount in the development and sustenance of stability in any political system (Dunmoye, 1994). While there are other factors that could collectively lead to this, political leadership remains at the centre of the dynamics by harnessing economic and human resources to achieve progress. Put differently, political leadership should be seen in terms of collective attributes of those who hold political responsibilities within a nation at a given time. It involves the capacity to evolve confidence in its policies and support in their implementation and the courage to drive through decisions that must be made. Effective political leadership is

driven by the desire to achieve the good for society and is never derailed by frustration or resistance because it is focused on an envisaged positive end. A genuine political leadership transcends narrow personal ends and constantly pursues public end that is broad and favours the majority. Within the Nigerian context, a political leader will be one with the ability and willingness to harness and mobilize resources for the greatest good for the greatest number of citizens. This involves the use of political authority from an understanding of the aspiration of the public and evolves strategies for realizing them. An effective political leader must be able to set the agenda for the country for the future which encapsulates national aspirations. While this is captured in policy frameworks, the political leader matches this with convincing actions that are accountable and transparent. A political leader must seek to ensure equitable distribution of resources in an open and fair manner that would be devoid of corruption.

The phenomenon of corruption has remained an indisputable part of Nigeria's public life rising as years roll by. With every administration, corruption assumes a new height (Genyi, 2015). Intellectual thoughts on the phenomenon range from its consideration as "an abuse of public power for private gain that hampers the public interests" (GPAC, 2011). This United Nations Global Programme Against Corruption's (GPAC) notion is broad enough to also cover acts of private individuals in private spheres. Taken further in depth, Transparency International (TI) addresses the locus of power in corruption from a public angle which covers acts of public officials and those of individuals within the formal sector such as corporate bodies that may be private sector driven. In this context, corruption connotes the "abuse of entrusted power for private gain" (TI, 2000). The World Bank (2000) re-emphasizes the public sphere of corruption due to its intensity and resilience "as the abuse of public office for private gains for the benefit of the holder of the office or some third party". The motivation here is the selfish end of the perpetrator and collaborators. Perhaps corruption in the public space requires more emphasis because of the extent and magnitude of the resources and consequences on the entire society. This definition inclines towards political corruption or grand corruption. This covers acts that targets huge public resources such as outright looting, advance fee fraud scam, money laundering and operation of offshore accounts. Grand corruption consists of these acts that are widespread and systematic in nature with severe damage to the economy (Okojie & Momoh, 2005). Broadly therefore, political corruption represent acts intended to secure wealth or power through illegal means (Lipset & Lenz, 2000). Quick manifestation of grand corruption abound where public policy framework are compromised by corrupt practices. These reflect in privatization programmes, government procurement, electoral process and labour policies.

Corruption in whatever shade has permeated every aspect of our national life and is taken in many circles as a way of life in Nigeria (Waziri, 2010). But the effects of corruption on socio-economic development stride have been significant. Beyond retardation of overall economic wellbeing, it manifest in lack or decaying infrastructure like roads, railway, airports, educational facilities, inadequate power supply and worsening poverty and economic inequalities.

### **Political Leadership and Corruption in Nigeria's Fourth Republic**

Democratic government is founded on three values; legitimacy, accountability and capacity. These values are made possible through an institutional framework of rules and processes. Where a solid synergy is built between rules and processes the system becomes predictable, open and accountable. Government's legitimacy is crucial to obtaining compliance with rules and public policy directions. The legitimacy of democratic government is derived from the electoral system that brings it into power. Once the electorate is not responsible for creating a new government,

for example when a government is enthroned by a flawed electoral process, it generates legitimacy and credibility issues against itself. This then affects revenue extraction and service delivery capacities of government. Between credibility and accountability therefore exists a logical mutuality. For instance, democratic accountability relates to citizens capability to participate in government by erecting it through the ballot and where elected representatives are held accountable by the same nature (Schmitter & Karl, 1999). Institutionally, public institutions must demonstrate the capacity to ensure governmental operations are conducted within the bounds of established rules. By far more explicit is the fact that institutional capacity finds expression in the “independence and abilities of the judiciary, civil service and bureaucracies of government to police the rules without which government becomes whimsical, arbitrary and personalized (Odinkalu, 2010, p.19). This is what has become of democratic government in Nigeria since 1999. Rules were discarded in the conduct of public business and the whims of political leaders substituted rules of business.

It was Achebe (1983, p. 1) who argued that the “problem with Nigeria is simply and squarely the failure of leadership”. And this was political leadership. He stressed that Nigerians were corrupt because the system under which they lived then in the early 1980s “made corruption easy and profitable”. What he experienced in the 1980s blossomed and hit the clouds in the 2000s, again coincidentally under another democratic rule. At the inauguration of President Olusegun Obasanjo on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1999, he declared that “corruption is the greatest single bane of our society today” and vowed to deal with the phenomenon. Eight years afterwards, President Obasanjo left the country more corrupt than he found it in 1999 with his indelible marks on the sands of the phenomenon during his tenure.

President Obasanjo gave the false impression that he was determined to curb corruption through public pronouncements against the vice and the seeming determination not to spare anyone involved. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was thus established in 2003 with the Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) earlier in 2000. These institutions were simply apron strings of the president who deployed them as attack dogs on perceived enemies of government. President Obasanjo’s corrupt tendencies began to manifest when he refused vehemently to publish his declaration of assets. The president frustrated efforts towards the reality of the freedom of information by refusing to forward it to the National Assembly as an executive bill and vetoed it when it was eventually passed same. Without access to information by civil society especially vital official records, a window which the FOI bill sought to provide, the anti-corruption crusade was dead on arrival. It is this danger of exposure that President Obasanjo perceived and dawdled on pushing for FOI bill passage into law.

The rape of democracy and governance in Anambra state occurred under the watchful eyes and direction of the President. While Andy Uba, the President’s domestic adviser and ‘godfather’ in Anambra desecrated the office of the governor by holding Chris Ngige hostage, the president sanctioned the conduct with no action to restrain Chris Uba (Odinkalu, 2010; HRW, 2007). President Obasanjo’s business interest in Transcorp and influence for the sale of NITEL and NICON-Hilton Hotel to Transcorp are no hidden matter. When he presided over the Ministry of Petroleum Resources, four oil blocks went to Transcorp, where his business interest is unhidden.

The climax of corruption in the first eight years of the Fourth Republic arrive the scene in the efforts to amend the constitution to pave way for a third term. With an oil boom behind him to leverage, the President saw to the release of huge resources in bribery to legislators to effect the constitutional alteration (Odinkalu, 2010; El Rufai, 2011). Relatedly, President Obasanjo presided over two of the worst general elections in Nigeria. The 2003 and 2007 general elections witnessed

unprecedented electoral fraud, rigging, and violence. The electoral umpire headed by Professor Maurice Iwu “behaved as if he was clearly under instructions to announce predetermined results” (Odinkalu, 2010, p.34). This played out in the elections in Anambra and the 2007 general elections.

Though the Yar’Adua administration was short-lived, its record on anti-corruption is not impressive. The failure of the Nigerian judiciary under him to convict James Ibori, Lucky Igbenedion and perhaps Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, all former governors notorious for corruption will remain a dent on the administration’s anti-corruption efforts. Indeed, James Ibori became a close associate of President Yar’Adua and a major financial of his elections. Issues on anti-corruption came to a head when Nuhu Ribadu was forced out of EFCC as its Chairman (Ijewere & Dunmade, 2014). Whatever modest achievement made by the EFCC and ICPC between 2000 and 2009 pale in significance to the growth of corruption in Nigeria. Without a credible electoral process, supposedly elected public officials owed no allegiance to Nigerians because they obtained their positions outside a credible pool. From the presidency to the lowest level of government corruption was a free flow.

Under President Goodluck Jonathan, the country entered a new debate about what constituted corruption when he attempted to create a distinction between stealing and corruption. While TI rated Nigeria 136<sup>th</sup> out of 175 countries, President Jonathan described the exercise as an overblown image of corruption in the country. He referred to embezzlement of public funds as petty stealing and not corruption (Udo, 2015). Under Jonathan’s administration, the Minister of Petroleum Resources Diezani Allison-Madueke was untouchable and indeed a super minister. Under her the NNPC was alleged to have failed to remit over \$20billion to the Federation Account (BBC, 2016). Surprisingly even the National Assembly could not bring the Minister of Petroleum to provide satisfactory answers. This like many governors that served various states from 1999 – 2015, have numerous cases under investigation, but no one can guess when a conviction may or ever be achieved.

Then came the defense expenditure scandals, the height of political leadership’s insensitivity to national aspiration. At the peak of the Boko Haram insurgency, when the Nigerian military was stretched to its limits and found itself under severe and embarrassing attacks from the insurgents, the Federal Government sought and obtained approval for \$2.1billion foreign loan facility for the purchase of arms. The military was in dire need of new weaponry to prosecute the war against Boko Haram, an embarrassing national security challenge. By January 2015, the insurgents were in effective occupation of north eastern Nigeria with little swats of territory such as Maiduguri metropolis in Nigeria’s control. This period coincided with preparations for the general election in which the then ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was being fiercely challenged by the All Progressives Congress (APC). Rather than prosecute the war on Boko Haram, the \$2.1billion loan facility became slush funds for electioneering campaign for the presidential elections, a fund PDP leaders benefitted immensely from. In addition, friends, political associates and relatives through their companies shared in the loot while Nigerians were being slaughtered like chickens in north east (Akinwumi, 2016). A total of 241 firms in Nigeria were involved in the deal with notable Nigerians like Raymond Dokpesi, Olisa Metuh, Haliru Bello, Attahiru Bafarawa, Shuaibu Salisu among others (Tukur, 2015). The money was siphoned through phantom contracts to purchase 12 helicopters, four fighter jets and ammunition (BBC News, 2015). As a result of these Nigeria’s foreign reserves lost to corruption in weapons procurement have been put at \$15billion (Ojo, 2016). What a waste for a country whose economy is belly up due to the global slump in oil price, a major source of the country’s foreign exchange.

### **Implications of Corruption on National Development**

The level of development in Nigeria cannot be better expressed than these figures have indicated. By 2014, 44% of Nigerian students could not read a complete sentence upon completion of primary education. This represents the stark reality of the collapse of public basic education. More staggering, over 70% of candidates that sat for the West African School Certificate Examination in 2014 also failed to pass basic subjects like mathematics and English at credit level. Put differently, this number could obtain five credit passes in the examination. Similarly, between 2007 and 2010, it was estimated that the total number of Nigerian students that enrolled in foreign universities including Ghana rose by 71% (NES, 2014). These facts represent the undisputable ugly reality of the poor state of the country's education. This level of socio-economic condition, negative in unmistakable sense though points to the quality and state of national development that have obviously worsened in the last 16 years.

To buttress the notion that the country's political leaders have lost the vision and capacity to reposition the country due to corruption, President Obasanjo's response to the declining quality of education was to establish a mediocre National Examination Council (NECO) to further consolidate on graduation of ill prepared students. Those who cannot pass WAEC examinations do so in flying colours with uncountable distinctions in NECO examinations! In economic terms, Price Waterhouse scoopers (PwC) has projected that if not curtailed corruption would cost Nigeria 37% of GDP by 2030. Between 2000 and 2014, PwC further estimated that the country lost an average of \$2 - \$651 per person due to corruption.

One of the major and indisputable implications of corruption on national development is the incidence of poverty in Nigeria. At 46.0%, it is one of the highest in Africa and the rest of the world and this figure has been made possible in the last 16 years when the country enjoyed another oil boom. The country's unemployment figures are very high even when the economy has been growing at nearly 7% (NBS, 2016) between 2001 and 2006. According to the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics, (NBS) unemployment rate in Nigeria by the third quarter of 2015 was 9.9 percent representing a fourth consecutive rise since third quarter of 2014. The factors responsible for this rise range from epileptic electric power supply, another drain pipe that saw investments of US\$16 billion to no effect under President Obasanjo (Aderonmu, 2009). For these reasons foreign investments moved out of the country (Michelin) and self employed persons and local entrepreneurs have been forced to close their businesses rendering them and their employees redundant. Poor quality education and general lack of skills, the neglect of agriculture and other natural resources have thus compounded the unemployment situation. On top of these factors, is lack or inadequate investments in infrastructural development. It is corruption that has led to poor service delivery and social service provisioning in Nigeria. This is evident in lack of potable water supply, dilapidated road networks, poor health facilities, standard of education and insecurity (Adebayo, 2013; Ribadu, 2012). By 2011 unemployment rate was at 23.9% and rose by 9.9% in 2015. Poverty rose from 54.4% in 2004 to a staggering 60.9% in 2010. With public malfeasance on the rise involving all levels of government as well as its institutions including the National Assembly, no doubt this low level of national development has been foreclosed.

A sad commentary on the impact of corruption on national development is the high level of insecurity in the country. Due to lack of exemplary display of leadership that would show direction in public conduct in accountability, youth gangs in share criminality are recruited and maintained in arms by political leaders across the country. In turn these visit on society kidnapping, armed robbery, militancy and insurgency. The experience in the Niger Delta and

ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in the north east are clear indices of this trend. It is clear that no cause has been greater than corruption and the failure of political leadership responsible for the declining quality of our national development.

### **Conclusion: Breaking the Cycle**

Hanging on the conscience of the country are monumental corrupt cases in the last 16 years that collectively have negatively impacted national development, the implication of which it would take years to reverse. For example, huge cases of fraud by NNPC in turn around maintenance of \$400million and several billions of unremitted revenue to the state are notable (Adekeye, 2003; Shettima, 2009). National Audit Report in 2004 revealed loss of N23billion allegedly stolen by federal ministers under Obasanjo. Rather than be commended Vincent Azie the then Auditor General was removed. More than a decade later, a \$124million National Identity Card contract scam of 2001 is begging for attention (Ogbadi, 2012). Wasteful investment in the power sector, privatization blues, arms deals and CCTV bogus contracts remain land mark corrupt cases that have reduced the country to its knees with unimpressive or rather appalling national development indices.

Though corruption was institutionalized in the 1990s (Ibrahim, 2001; Kukah, 2009) it has been elevated to a virtue, a way of life and became legendary in the 2000s. It has been celebrated and enhanced by political leaders and promoted to a national activity. As noted by Odinkalu (2010) no political leader has ever done immeasurable damage to credibility of Nigeria's institutions by way of access and lack of accountability and the way in which havoc was wreaked on anti-corruption efforts than President Olusegun Obasanjo. He, more than any political leader in contemporary Nigeria is responsible for the monumental level of grand corruption in Nigeria in the fourth republic. He re-defined raw power and expanded and manipulated the process of access to power by undermining accountability and elevation of violence as the most effective strategy for obtaining positions and 'winning' election in Nigeria's democracy. Through bribery and contract rewards, national institutions and elites built financial empires from state resources and perfected celebrated public malfeasance. On top of the till sat President Obasanjo and his successors. The politicization and instrumentalization of anti-corruption efforts received the highest consideration under his regime.

To break the circle of corruption, the basis of accountability in a democracy must be restored. Nigerians must regain their choice and voice in determining who governs them. With the restoration democratic and public accountability through the electoral process will be engendered together with the capacity of the legislature at national and state levels to perform the triple roles of legislation, appropriation and oversight. As it stands, the legislature has stood the appropriation and oversight functions on their heads by furthering of corruption rather than accountability. The oversight relating to the power sector and the bribery allegations that ensued during the 7<sup>th</sup> Assembly are sufficient reminders. Meaningful and rigorous judicial reforms are long overdue and the place to begin is the separation of the office of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation. The latter once severed would become independent to handle prosecution of criminal matters with little or no interference of the president or governors. In this way, national anti-corruption institutions will come under the purview of the Attorney General at national and state levels sufficiently insulated from political influence. With assured tenure of office the capacity of the Attorney General to function effectively and efficiently would be better guaranteed. With enhanced investment in skills development and activation of judicial autonomy the judiciary should be able to handle and deliver on justice administration in a manner that differs



from prevailing kindred feeling in the judiciary. This measure holds the promise to throw up genuine political leaders with concern for National Development rather than themselves. It will also remove the incentive of impunity in governance.

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