

VARIOUS DIMENSIONS OF CORRUPTION IN NIGERIA: A CASE OF THE NIGERIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

IGWE, MONDAY NWEKE
Department of Accountancy
Alex Ekwueme Federal University
Ebonyi State Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *The main purpose of this study was to explore the various street level corruptions perpetrated in the Nigerian public sector. The study adopted qualitative research design in order to gain insight into the various dimensions of street level corruption committed by bureaucrats occupying positions of authorities in the Nigerian public sector. It went further to explore the conceptual, theoretical and empirical review as to have a better understanding of street level corruption, its history, kinds, causes and its consequences on the Nigerian economy in order to draw a valid conclusion and as well as make possible recommendations. The study concluded that corruption in the Nigerian public sector is like an intractable conflict which cannot be curbed completely but can only be managed to the barest minimum. The researchers recommended that, for the Nigeria government to win the war against corruption in her public sector, the issue of proper accountability among the public office holders should not be compromised. This is because lack of proper accountability stands as the bane of all other forms of corruption currently spreading in the public service. Corruption fight would never be won if the key players in the economy are not held accountable to the masses and government businesses carried out in open and transparent manner*

Keywords: Corruption, Public Sector, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

All over the world, the issue of public sector corruption has become a thing of serious concern especially in a developing country like Nigeria. One of the major problems dominating public sector in Nigeria is the problem of lack of accountability as a result of high level of corruption among public office holders in Nigerian (Addison, 1996 cited in Ejere, 2013).

This cankerworm has permeated almost all sphere of the Nigerian economy. The collapse of the public sector as we see today in Nigeria has direct link with corruption which has led to slow economic development and agitation for political freedom in many regions in Nigeria.

In 2011, Transparency International ranked Nigeria 143th out of 182 nations of the world ravaged by the menace of corruption. This index indicated the level of corruption in Nigeria as compared to other countries where the same survey was carried out.

The ranking was based on specific criteria which are; bribery of civil servants, use of contracts to compensate political thugs, budget abuses, cuts in public procurement, embezzlement, and the efforts of the various agencies whose duty is to fight corruption and corrupt practices in each of the countries surveyed (Akosile 2011).

According to (Dike, 2005, Ihenacho, 2004; Oliyide & Odeku, 2002; Oloja 2002; Aluko, 2009 cited in Iyanda, 2012) corruption could manifest in the form of delay in movement of files from one office to another, police extortion from motorist using the highway, port congestion, long hours of queues at the Nigerian Immigration Service office in order to obtain international

passport, long queues at fuelling stations, ghost workers syndrome, electoral malpractices, students at the higher institutions paying money to lecturers to pass exams and so on.

Corruption enables few privileged individuals to convert what belong to the general public to their personal properties which at the long run results to widespread poverty and poor state of infrastructure amongst other societal problems.

A result of poor state of public accountability in Nigeria, corruption has become a culture to the extent that people no longer see corruption as evil in the society and as a result, corrupt public office holders are now highly respected in public functions thereby making it a recurrent decimal in the society (Ejere, 2013).

Corruption hinders eradication of poverty and economic growth, this is because it distorts resource sharing and government efficiency due to the fact that corrupt public servants without proper service orientation, become more engrossed with wealth accumulation than rendering selfless services to the general public (Islam & Ananya, 2015). Although, we have different levels of corruption in Nigeria but this study only focused on bureaucratic or street level corruption. This is because the study is only concern with corruption in the administration of the Nigerian public sector which affects the masses in their daily lives.

Conceptual Framework

The word corruption is popular in a negative way. World Bank and Transparency International (TI) defined corruption as the misuse of public office for private gain (Elazar, 1972; Burrell & Morgen, 1988 cited in Islam & Ananya, 2015). "Corruption can equally be seen as a civil servants self-interest seeking behaviour, which is associated with the particulars of their job, such as the level of power they have, or the nature of the task they are performing" (Tilman, 1968 cited in Islam & Ananya, 2015).

We have different types of corruption but the main focus of this work is street level corruption. Street level corruption could be defined as corruption which occurs as a result of bureaucrats applying their judgment in the execution of policy statements of government which have been vested on them by the constitution (Dike, 2005).

History of Corruption in the Nigerian Public Sector

The menace of public sector corruption in Nigeria dated far back to the colonial era. British colonial masters used direct and indirect rule through the aid of the locals to carry out their political administration in different regions that made up the colonized territory.

A good number of these local policy administrators were not indigenes of the regions under their direct control. As time goes on, few of these administrators started using their positions for their selfish interest. These colonial administrators became more corrupt and sophisticated which led to more abuse and misuse of their authorities (Owolabi 2007).

When Nigeria gained her independence in 1960, corruption traced back to the first republic between 1963-1966. At this era, the democratic regime was accused of electoral misconduct which gave room to military intervention in the Nigerian political system. Corruption was the major reason adduced by the military for venturing into politics in Nigeria in 1966. The military corruption campaign did not last long due to the fact that even the military became more corrupt and dirty in their desire to acquire material gain which led to several

blood baths in Nigeria in the form of coup d'état. The 1970's oil boom gave rise to huge contracts which further increase corruption during the military era.

For example, the Gowon led government embarked on after-war rebuilding which gave rise to a lot of fake contracts. The excess money in the Nigerian economy back then as a result of the discovery of oil in commercial quantity resulted to pricing of money over morals which further fuelled corruption in the system (Adele, 1998 cited in Abdullahi, Abdullahi & Yelwa, 2012). It is also worthy to note that the Yakubu Gowon government contributed seriously to reduction national values, especially with its Supreme Military Council awarding elephant projects which were never executed (Diamond, 1998 cited in Folarin, 2009).

Nigeria returned back to civilian rule in the year 1999 with Gen. Obasanjo as the elected president sought after to produce fresh culture of governance, and to accomplish this, he put in place the following:

- (i) Initiated the process of recovery of stolen funds from foreign banks;
- (ii) Put in place ad-hoc panels of inquiry to probe and report on allegations of corruption other failed contracts
- (iii) Established the ICPC later known as EFCC to investigation and prosecute persons implicated in corruption and other economic related offenses;
- (iv) put in place reform of the public sector by introducing privatization and commercialization of government business entities; monetization of incentives of public servants, ensuring prompt pensions and retirement benefits payments;
- (v) Entered into agreement with international anti- graft agencies such as the UN Conventions, the AU convention, the ECOWAS protocol; and (vi)Used all available medium to show his zero tolerance for corruption and the importance of ethical and moral reorientation (Enweremadu, 2010).

Despite all these efforts of various regimes including the current war against corruption by the present government headed by president Mohammadu Buhari, street level corruption is still raging like whirl fire in the Nigerian public sector. This means that much still need to be done to ensure that the national resources do not end up in the pockets of few privileged individuals while the masses end up in abject poverty.

Kinds of Corruption in the Nigerian Public Sector

There are various kinds of corruption in the Nigerian public sector but this study as earlier stated is concerned with street level corruption which takes place in the cause of policy administration in the Nigerian public sector. This kind of corruption occurs as a result of bureaucrats applying their judgment in the execution of policy statements of government which have been vested on them by the constitution (Dike, 2005).

If not checked, bureaucratic discretion can result to corruption. This is because bureaucrats can decide to treat some citizens unjustly.

Street level corruption manifest in various kinds which include the following:

- **Bribery:** This is the act of giving money in cash or kind to induce public office holders to act in ways contrary to their oath of office (Dike, 2005). In the Nigerian public sector, bribe is rampant in the cause of implementation of policy statements of government. Common bribes include; inducement to pay reduced taxes and licenses, influencing government's choice in contract bid, allocation of government incentives, such as subsidies to private organisations or

individuals and access to pensions or unemployment insurance. Bribes can differ in size, kind, and the amount a public office holder can benefit from accepting to compromises his /her oath of office (Moseley, 1999 cited in Okekeocha, 2013).

Other kinds of street level corruption according to Moseley (1999 cited in Okekeocha, 2013) are:

- **Grand corruption:** This involves global business transactions. Here bureaucrats and politicians collaborate with international organisations to defraud the government in a particular business transaction for their own benefits.
- **Minor corruption:** This occurs when a person or group of persons seek franchise or service from the government in an illegal way, this might not have much influence on the country but at the long run can result to negative consequences on the government. This can reduce the resources which would have been shared to the masses as to improve their economic wellbeing. Often times, people who engaged in grand corruption make news headlines of newspapers and other media outfit, but when analyzed, the sum of petty corruption outweighs the total cost of grand corruption.
- **Public sector fraud:** This is another type of bureaucratic corruption whereby individuals look for ways to take undue advantage of government grants and services for their selfish gain. This type of fraud involves stealing public money, which may affect the generality of the masses. Public office holders who take part in such act take advantage of the public and obstruct the delivery of the right public goods and services to the citizenry.
- **Embezzlement:** This occurs when public office holders steal funds from the government offices where they are working. This is the most common way public office holders in Nigeria accumulate public funds for their own selfish gains at the detriment of the masses.
- **Public sector extortion:** This kind of street level corruption is concern with the extraction of public resources and other income through the use of force or violence. For instance, police and custom extortion on the highways.
- Lastly, public office holders most times adopt favoritism as a means of misuse of power, this happens when there is extremely prejudiced in the distribution of state funds. Public office holders in Nigeria often use their position of authority as a means to favour their friends, families and other well wishers.

Causes of Corruption in the Nigerian Public Sector

According to Ene, Arikpo, Williams and Dunnamah (2013) the following are the major causes of corruption in the Nigerian public sector:

Inability of government to pay salaries and allowances of workers

As a result of the economic recession raving Nigeria since 2016, government at all level is yet to pay many of their workers arrears of salaries and allowances. These civil servants whose salaries are owed still have they basic needs like, food, shelter, health care services, transportation and their families to take cater for not minding the current economic hardship in the country, as a result, these workers can easily compromise their offices to satisfy their immediate needs.

Greediness

Man's insatiable nature over material possession is also another major factor responsible for corruption in the Nigerian public sector. Most of these public office holders are so greedy and as such, are never content with whatever they have. Majority of these workers also see their office as a means of accumulating wealth for themselves and their immediate families while the citizens are left in abject poverty.

Godfathers

Majority of the public office holders have their political godfathers who will never allow them to be prosecuted even when cut in the act of corruption and therefore, people with such immunity, handle their offices and government businesses as though it were their personal businesses thereby encouraging the widespread of corrupt practices.

Ethnic Sentiment

These days, politicians use government offices to compensate people from their ethnic extraction not minding their level of competence and whatever act of corruption committed in their various offices are not regarded as corruption.

Lack of Proper Motivation

Most workers in the Nigerian public sectors are generally not properly motivated so as to boost their morale in the cause of their duties. Some of them are even out rightly denied of their promotions and other incentives.

Nature of the Nigerian Society

In the Nigeria society corrupt public offices holders are celebrated in their communities. They go as far as giving them chieftaincy titles and other privileges, even in different churches today members who are known to be corrupt are given front sits in church and as well as different church titles.

Lack of Proper Accountability

In the Nigeria public sector, the issue of lack of proper accountability has become a thing of serious concern. This is because it is the bane of all other forms of corruption currently spreading in the public service. Corruption fight would never be won if the key players in the economy are not held accountable to the masses and government businesses carried out in open and transparent manner.

Various Ways Public Office Holders Defraud the Government

There are numerous ways the public office holders defraud the government, though not limited to the following:

Payroll Scam

This happens when salaries and allowances are paid to non-existing workers (ghost workers). The money paid to these ghost workers most times end up in the pocket of top public office holders. Payroll fraud is not limited to federal workers; the various state governments have equally had their fair share of ghost worker syndrome. State governments in Nigeria lost

huge amount of money every year as a result of payroll scam. Most Payroll Fraud is usually not investigated except where there is serious public outcry (okekeocha, 2013).

Travel Allowance

Most top civil servants extort the government through the claim of travel allowances which they never embarked on, even those who actually traveled sometimes try to claim expenditures not incurred by them in an effort to defraud the government.

Public office holders are allowed to go on tour as to boost their morale as well as improve on their job experiences, but sometimes, workers use this as an opportunity to steal from the government (Ribadu, 2007).

Money Laundry

Many public office holders have at various times used their position or office to cat away huge sums of money belonging to the government into different foreign bank accounts operated by them. As result of the negative effect of money laundry to the economic wellbeing of the nation, government at all levels has established various anti- Corruption agencies to curb this ugly trend (Mohammed 2013).

Negative Consequences of Corruption Street Level Corruption on economic Development

Street level corruption has far reaching consequences on the socio-economic life of any nation. This is due to the fact that few individuals enrich themselves at the detriment of a country's national development. Street level corruption is a universal problem and its impact on the citizens, governments, and the international community has made it an issue of universal nature.

Lima Declaration, asserts that: street level corruption erode the moral fabric of the society, violate social and economic rights of the poor and vulnerable, undermine democracy and the rule of law, as well as slows development and denies the society, particularly the poor the benefits of free and open competition (Igbuzor, 2008; Ikubaje, 2004 cited in Egwemi, 2012).

Bello-Imam (2004 cited in Egwemi, 2012), on the other hand, listed the negative cost of street level corruption as follows:

- Slow economic growth and development: Street level corruption slows economic growth and as well discouraged direct foreign investment.
- Inappropriate allocation of Talent: Street level corruption makes it possible for people to seek more of white collar job where they perceive that they can enrich themselves very fast instead of engaging in other productive ventures which would have brought rapid national economic growth and development.
- Reduction in the flow of foreign Aids: In a country where street level corruption is order of the day, foreign donors will reluctant to put in their funds.
- Loss of income: In a country where there is rampant street level corruption, income is usually lost through tax evasion or inappropriate tax exemption claims.
- Budget Forgery: In a country where street level corruption is dominant, public office holders usually engage in budget forgery in order to steal from the government which results to wastage of national resources.
- Poor quality service delivery: In a corrupt system where there is no transparent contract bids, contractors delivery poor quality infrastructures or sometimes, abandon the project.

Theoretical Framework

There are numerous theories of corruption but this study only focused on modernization and agency cost theory.

Modernization Theory

Modernization theory is among the leading theories of corruption. Huntington (1968 cited in Lyanda, 2012) stated that: the process of economic and political development in modernizing societies tends to breed inequality, political instability and corruption which may be defined simply in terms of the use of public powers to achieve private goals.

Adefulu (2007) is of the opinion that corruption in public sector in Nigeria is caused by the behaviours of public office holders which does not conform to the accepted value system in the society, and which also indicates the lack of efficient political institution which appropriately differentiates public duties from personal interest. Adefulu equally said that Huntington opinion which likened the cause of corruption to political under development exposed a very narrow idea of tackling the menace of corruption in the public sector in Nigeria.

Agency Cost Theory

According to Roshanak (2013 cited in Igwe, 2017) Agency theory is concerned with the diverging interest when ownership and management are separated. The theory argues that there is usually a conflicting interest between the agent (employees), and the principal (government).

The argument of this theory is that the separation of management from the owners creates conflicts among the owners of public economic resources and the public office holders. The emergence of the conflicts creates corruption and tension which results to high agency cost. It is assumed that the final objective of government is to raise the general standard of living of her citizens through functional and efficient public service delivery. On the other side, agents (employees) may have other objectives rather than the actualization of the already set objectives of the government.

If the agents do not meet the principals' interests and objectives, then conflicts arise among them. The leading argument behind the agency theory is that an average employees act in their own interest instead of that of the authorities. They are looking for more wealth, prerequisites, and in the worst cases getting a hand on government assets and other cash flows.

This study is anchored on the agency cost theory due to the fact that the agents (employees) usually have privileged information about the functioning of the public sector than the principal (government). These agents in an attempt to take advantage of the government in order to enrich themselves engage in corrupt practices.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Delavallade (2006) studied corruption and distribution of public spending in developing countries. The study empirically examined the impact of corruption on the structure of government spending by sector. He used three-stage least squares technique on 64 countries

for the period between 1996-2001. The study revealed that public sector corruption disorganises the nature of public expenditure by reducing education, health and social security.

Ene et al (2013) examined corruption control and political stability in Nigeria. The study pointed out an obvious indication that Nigeria politics is a direct opposite of what is obtainable in developed nations of the world.

They are of the view that African politics is still backward especially with regards to societal value and fulfilment of political promises made to the electorates during political campaigns. They equally went ahead to say that Nigeria politicians are characterised by corruption, greed, violence, tribalism and intimidation.

The study was based on the effects of corruption on the socio-economic development of Nigeria and other Africa countries. They equally agreed that notable Corruption practices in the Nigeria public sector include: fraud, embezzlement, misappropriation of public funds, inflation of contracts, sexual harassment, bribery etc.

Iyanda (2012) in his study corruption definitions, theories and concepts stated that corruption is now a way of life in every part of the world and not just Nigeria alone. He went further to argue that Corruption is a universal evil which beats man's intelligence in all aspects. He maintained that corruption is an unsociable behaviour as well as an epidemic which has penetrated so much into the Nigerian society and gives undue advantage to few individuals. He finalised by saying that corruption is a contagious and incurable infection which undermines governments' effort to provide welfare services to the citizens.

Abdullahi, Abdullahi & Yelwa (2012) studied corruption in Nigeria: towards a new paradigm for effective democratic governance and sustainable development. They agreed with the work of Iyanda (2012) which maintained that Corruption as a universal problem has become a dominant venture in under developed countries of the world especially in Nigeria. They were equally of the opinion that the history of corruption is as old as man on earth. They found out that both military and civilian regimes in Nigeria have not been able to tackle corruption as to provide quality service delivery to the Nigerian populace.

Egwemi (2012) examined corruption practices in Nigeria. He argued that, though corruption is a global concern but its magnitude still varies from country to country. For instance, in Nigeria, the problem of corruption appears to be incurable. Despite all the noise on the media about war against corruption, the social evil is still waxing strong in the country as it is gradually becoming an accepted value system in the Nigerian society. Although much has been done on the effects of corruption in the Nigerian public sector but notwithstanding, corruption is on the high side; therefore this study has contributed to knowledge by adding to the existing literature on street level corruption in an attempt to expose its danger in the Nigerian public sector and the need to curb the ugly menace.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted qualitative research design as to gain insight into the various dimensions of street level corruption committed by bureaucrats occupying positions of authority in the Nigerian public sector. It went further to explore the conceptual, theoretical and empirical review as to have a better understanding of street level corruption, its history, types, causes and consequences in order to draw a valid conclusion and as well as make possible recommendations.

CONCLUSION

From the conceptual, theoretical and empirical review, the researchers therefore conclude that corruption in the Nigerian public sector is like an intractable conflict which cannot be completely curbed but can only be managed to the barest minimum.

This conclusion is in line with the work of Iyanda (2012); Abdullahi, Abdullahi and Yelwa (2012) which state that corruption in the Nigeria public sector corruption is an incurable contagious infection which has undermined the efforts of Nigerian Government to provide welfare services to her citizens.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- If Nigeria wants to win the war against corruption in her public sector, the issue of proper accountability among the public office holders should not be compromised. This is because lack of proper accountability stands as the bane of all other forms of corruption currently spreading in the public service. Corruption fight would never be won if the key players in the economy are not held accountable to the masses and government businesses carried out in open and transparent manner
- For government to make significant impact on their war against corruption in the Nigerian public sector as well as other sectors, they should be more sincere in the way and manner they are carrying out their corruption war. They should realize that they cannot fight corruption using corrupt people, therefore should clear its cabinet and the public sector in general of people with questionable characters.
- They should as well give a comprehensive account of all the money so far realized in their corruption fight in order to win the confidence of Nigerians.
- Corruption cases should not be allowed to stay above six months in court before the necessary judgments are passed on the accused persons.
- As a matter of urgent national concern, government at all level should make considerable efforts to clear all arrears of salaries and allowances owed to it workers and henceforth be up to date in salary payment.
- Adequate punishment should be given to anyone convicted of corruption as to serve as deterrent to others with corrupt intent.
- Public service motivation (PSM) should be used to boost the morale of workers in the Nigerian public sector.

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