

Anti-Corruption and Accountability: Joining the crusade

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Corruption has been the bane to legitimate governance, democratic stability and socio-economic and political development of many societies in developing countries. Corruption is a menace that has bedeviled the country as a whole, and there is a plethora of its crippling effects in Nigeria, some of which include lack of development, high crime rate, and lack of moral value in the society. Corruption also gives a country bad reputation, together with unemployment, and poverty to mention a few.

Corruption can be defined as the dishonest or fraudulent conduct of those in power, which typically involves giving or taking bribe, deceiving someone to get money for personal gain, favoring relatives and friends with jobs they are not qualified to do. According Morris (1991), "Corruption is the illegitimate use of power to benefit a private interest". Corruption can also be described as using any undue influence in pursue of whatever interest. This also corroborates the definition give by Tresiman (2010) who defined corruption as the misuse of public office for private gain.

The phenomenon of corruption cuts across both public and private sectors, and even across macro and micro levels of social interaction. Corruption in its various types may include: political corruption, moral corruption, judicial corruption and economic corruption. Arguably, the most disturbing and highest level corruption is political corruption which is also known as grand corruption, is the large scale transfer of public resources by government officials for private gain. Under this type of corruption, damage done is directly

on the country as a whole. Most practiced forms of corruption in Nigeria are embezzlement, nepotism and cronyism, grafts, kick backs, bribery, and election rigging among others.

In most countries around the world various anti-corruption mechanisms are set up to combat corruption. These mechanisms or activities are put in place to oppose, punish and discourage corruption, and are designed to eradicate or prevent dishonest or fraudulent conducts, especially in the socio-economical and political context.

Anti-corruption crusade, as it has been termed in recent times, will lead to accountability, which is of immense importance in the public sector. This is because both elected and non-elected officials need to show the public that they are performing their responsibilities in the best possible ways with the resources at their disposal. This means that all government officials must be responsible to the citizens, and must always justify the source and utilization of public funds of their disposal in order to reduce corruption and increase accountability.

Most often, in order to fight corruption, government usually set up anti-corruption agencies to fight corruption. These anti-corruption, or Anti-graft, agencies are designed to fight, eradicate or prevent dishonest or fraudulent conducts, especially in a political context. The National Assembly and State Houses of Assembly both play an important role in this anti-corruption crusade, as they exercise the power of investigation. The judiciary, which comprises of all courts within the country, is also involved in the enforcement of anti-corruption laws since suspected offenders will be tried before them.

Examples of agencies established to specifically fight corruption are:

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC): which was specially and specifically dedicated to tackling economic and financial crimes in the Nigeria. The EFCC has gained some success through the past years, and the statistics of record of investigation and convictions from 2003 to 2011 confirms this: 36 convictions, 75 under trial and 105 under investigations. Presently, there are notable cases at the federal high court of Nigeria which includes EFCC VS Dame Patience Jonathan where EFCC obtained an order to seize the sum of USD\$22.3 million in her account in Skye Bank, and a case of allegation of N450 million frauds between EFCC against Mohammed Belgoresan and Professor Abubakar Suleiman, former Minister of National Planning.

Another agency is the Public Complaint Commission which was established under the Public Complaints Commission Act and operates to protect the public against corrupt oppressive exercise of power by public officials and even citizens against one another.

The third agency is the Code of Conduct Tribunal whose primary responsibility is the trial of persons who violate the provision of the code of conduct of public offices. In other words, the main thrust of the code is to prevent corruption in public life and offices.

The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) was established under the corrupt practices and other related offences act and operates to protect the public services against corrupt practices. This agency in its recorded fight against corruption and bringing culprits to account shows that it has discovered and dealt with many groups of corrupt officials in some ministries, departments

and agencies, with recovery of over 100 exotic vehicles, including armored bullet proof utility vehicles (SUV) worth over N450 million.

The Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) is not left behind in this anti-corruption war. The notable case taken to the Code of Conduct Bureau was the case between EFCC vs. the present Nigerian Senate President, Bukola Saraki, where he was standing trial for corruption and false assets declaration he made before he became governor in 2003.

The national securities agencies act also provides for three agencies namely the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) and the State Security Service (SSS), which together with numerous anti-corruption and transparency units established in various government ministries and agencies, helps in monitoring, reporting and dealing with corrupt tendencies and practices.

However, the country's many agencies' anti-corruption crusade has been hindered by many factors, among which is lack of transparency and accountability. The ill stain of corruption did not spare even the anti-graft agencies as the former chairman of Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) Ibrahim Lambode, was accused of fraudulently diverting over many proceeds from funds recovered by the agency (Adeyemi 2016). The News Agency of Nigeria (NAN) also reported that Nyako, the former governor of adamawa state and seven others, including companies are standing trial before the court on a 37-count charge bordering on money laundering (Pulse 2016).

Accountability has been defined as the obligation of an individual or organization to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them and to disclose the results in a transparent manner. It also includes the responsibility

for money or other entrusted property. Accountability connotes the state of being liable and requires a specified person or group of people to report and justify their actions in relations to specific matters or assigned a duty (Borens, 2007). Also, accountability focuses on the sanctions or procedures by which public officials can be held to account for their actions.

In other words, anti-corruption activities go hand- in-hand with accountability. Anti-corruption acts are designed to eradicate or prevent dishonest and fraudulent conducts, especially in a political context. Given this, anti-corruption and accountability would aid in having a transparent and free-corrupt nation.

The lack of accountability is one of the leading factors that have given rise to the increase in corrupt acts and cases in Nigeria. In the year 2017, Transparency International (TI) carried out their survey, and Nigeria ranked 148 out of 180 surveyed countries in terms of transparency, an index used in measuring corruption and accountability. It is very disappointing that in the latest corruption perception index released by Transparency International, Nigeria has relapsed deeper into corruption.

According to other surveys by Transparency International in its corruption perception index, it is evident that lack of accountability and transparency from public officials has led the country into the doom of immense corruption for the past years and even currently. The lack of accountability from the public officials has made corruption more attractive and easier to get away with no penalty whatsoever.

Conclusively, these anti-graft agencies in the fight against corruption have faced numerous problems which have hindered them in effectively and efficiently

combating corruption in Nigeria, some of which are lack of special covert operations, culprits not harshly penalized to deter others, lack of assets forfeiture law, inadequate financial support, lack of accountability, out-dated laws, media trials, hasty investigations and lack of strong exhibits.

I would recommend that accountability, which is one of the fundamental prerequisites for preventing corruption need to be instilled into every facet of public offices. Enforcement agencies must also be well-equipped in order to enforce laws and be given the authority to prosecute anybody regardless of his/her position. There is also need for reformation of the anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria, as these agencies should also be accountable to the public. Accountability in every government agencies, including the anti-corruption is also a way of curbing corruption. Once accountability measures are fully implemented, public officials will be under the scrutiny of the public. Accountability should be made the very foundation of the fight against corruption in Nigeria.

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