

CORRUPTION AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION IN NIGERIA: A DISCOURSE OF CORE ISSUES

By

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Introduction

Nigeria is rich in natural and human resources, with a population of over 150 million people; the most populous country in Africa. At the time of her political independence, on 1st October 1960, Nigeria excelled in production of agricultural produce such as groundnut, palm oil, cocoa, cotton, beans, timber and hides and skins

Then, during the oil boom period of the seventies Nigeria made headlines with her oil wealth, as a country richly endowed with oil and natural gas resources capable of financing a number of important projects to meet basic consumption and development needs (Salisu, 200:2). With per capital income of around \$1,100 during the late 1970's Nigeria was regarded as the fastest growing country in Sub-Saharan Africa (Salisu, Ibid). Yet it remains predominantly underdeveloped due to the scourge of corruption that has corroded it.

Corruption denies the ordinary citizen the basic means of livelihood, it worsens unemployment and erodes our image as a nation and as individual (Danjuma Goje 2010:1). It has undermined Nigeria's economic growth and development potential, with a per capital income of \$340, Nigeria now ranks amongst the least developed countries in the World Bank League table (Salusi, op.cit). Nigeria's higher education system once regarded as the best in Sub-Saharan Africa is in deep

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crisis. Health services are woefully inadequate, graduate unemployment is rising and so too is crime rate (Salisu, Ibid).

This culture of corruption which is rampant at national level constitutes a threatening force to development at grassroots level. It has been a significant factor leading to the general failure of local government as well as an excuse for suspending representative institution (Humes and Ola, N.D:104).

Corrupt practices have been deleterious not only because they divert funds from public purposes to private purses but also they undermine the vitality of local government (Ibid).

This paper therefore, examines the crisis of corruption in Nigerian local government administration. It is divided into five parts viz: the introduction, concept of corruption, concept of local government, corruption in Nigerian local government system: the causes, effects and manifestation and finally the conclusion, which is the way forward.

Conceptualization of Terms

Within the disciplinary parameters of social science, the issue of definition of concepts has not been problem free. This has been largely due to the eclectic nature and paradigmatic dispositions of respective disciplines within the field (Akindele et al, 1997:1). Given this, there is a need for caution on the part of any analyst in giving precise meaning to concepts in the social sciences, particularly when such meanings could not have been unconnected with the perspective, ideological persuasion or the unit of analysis of such analyst (Akindele et al, Ibid). Therefore, for more classification and their usage in this work it is appropriate to start the conceptual framework with the term corruption.

Concept of Corruption

As a result of the complexity of corruption, its effects on the systemic existence of its victims as does its prevalence through the efforts of its perpetrators, its definition has continued to be shrouded by value preference and differences (Akindele and Adeyemi, 2011:8). This has to some extent complicated the attainment of a definitional uniformity on the concept within the academia and practicing world of administration.

Given this, the elusiveness of the definition of corruption (depending on the definer and perspective) within the parameter of intellectual discourse on Nigerian State and beyond, was eloquently evoked by Gboyega quoted in Olasupo (2009:188) as thus:

Corruption involves the giving and taking of bribe, or illegal acquisition of wealth using the resources, of a public office,

including the exercise of discretion. In this regard, it is those who have business to do with government who are compelled somehow to provide inducement to public officials to make them do what they had to do or grant undeserved favour. It is therefore defined as official taking advantage of their offices to acquire wealth or other personal benefit.

The above quotation was corroborated by McMullan (1969:183-184) when he defines corruption in the following way:

A public official is corrupt if he accepts money or money's worth for doing something that he is under a duty to do anyway, that he is under a duty not to do or exercise a legitimate discretion for improper reasons.

Otite (1986:12) in his own explanation sees corruption as :

Perversion of integrity or state of affair through bribery, favour or moral depravity. It involves the injection of additional but improper transaction aimed at changing the normal course of events and altering judgments and positions of trust. It consists in doers and receivers' use of informal, extra-legal or illegal act to facilitate matter.

Olopoenia (1998:17) put this definition in a broad perspective of three categories as thus:

Theoretically, the literature distinguishes among political, bureaucratic and economic corruption; practically however, these three typologies are no more than different perceptions of the same monster. But all these manifestations are motivated by the desire to use the instrumentality of office for private gains for the benefit of the official, his relations, ethnic group or friends at the expenses of the general good.

Nwabueze (2002:128) in his own contribution adopted a sociological approach to the definition of corruption. He conceptualized corruption in the following way:

A form of social deviance in some cases, of criminal deviances, the result of failure or lack of will to respect the norms of social interactions. It is an extra-legal or normative approach to gaining

access. It is a form of mal-adaptation involving the acceptance of society's cultural goals and the rejection of the socially approved means of attaining the goals. It is an indictment on the ineffectiveness of society's socialization function; a sign of some defects in the development of citizen's personality system. It indicates the existence of weakness in agencies of social control which should punish rather than reward the perpetrator of corruption

Corruptions, according to him take several forms on one hand, if a public officer embezzles public funds kept in his trust that is corruption. In the same view, if he does unauthorized spending or exceeds approved limits for dubious ends, this is corruption. If he, in deviance of the rules, allocates government land to himself, his wife, his child or friends or otherwise appropriates his position to his or other person's unfair advantage it is corruption. If he over values a contract so that he could earn a kick-back, this is corruption (Nwabueze, Ibid).

A careful examination of the above definition and explanation demonstrate that corruption in Nigeria takes two terms namely political and economic.

Political corruption is the use of legislative powers by government officials for illegitimate private gain (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). From the political point of view, the perpetrators are political office holders, bureaucrats, public servants, the press and the general public. This has stigmatized the image of the government, weaken its credibility and reduced the effectiveness of the development programmes and policies; and also to a great extent, weaken the economy of the nation (see Aransi, 2008:63).

Economic corruption ravaging the Nigeria economy could be noticed in financial institutions such as banks, the insurance companies and the stock brokers (Aransi, *ibid*).

Corruption is a world- wide phenomenon which has been with societies throughout the history. It has caused political and economic instability in societies and depending on the scale, it has led to social conflict and violence, as competing groups vie for state power which is the source of distribution of resources and other amenities in society (Odunuga 2000:55).

The effect of corruption is grievous. It undermines economic performance. According to Iyoha, in (Akindele and Adeyemi , 2010:3). "Nigeria's overall economic performance since independence in 1960 has been decidedly unimpressive. Despite the availability and expenditure in colossal amounts of foreign exchange derived mainly from its oil and gas resources, economic growth has been weak and the incidence of poverty has increased. It is estimated that Nigeria received over US\$22 billion from oil export receipt between 1981 and

1999. Yet the number of Nigerians living in abject poverty – that is, on less than \$1 a day—more than doubled between 1970 and 2000 and the proportion of population living in poverty rose from 36% in 1970 to 70% in 2000”.

Given the above quotation, it is the opinion of this paper, that corruption within the Nigerian state is the main cause of this problem.

Concept of Local Government

It is important at this junction to examine this concept vis-à-vis the contributions of various scholars on this subject matter. As a concept and one of the subordinate units in federal political system arrangement, it has attracted definitions of various scholars. Therefore, there is not unanimous agreement between these scholars on the definition of local government.

However, the United Nations Office for Public Administration quoted in Ola and Tonwe (2009:4) defines local government as thus:

A political subdivision of a nation or (in a federal system) state, which is constituted by law and has substantial control of local affairs, including the powers to impose taxes or to exact labour for prescribed purposes. The governing body of such an entity is elected or otherwise locally selected.

Along this dimension, the International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences cited Adeyemo (2010:7) defines it as:

A political subdivision of a Nation or Regional Government which performs functions which in nearly all cases receives its legal power from national or regional government but possesses some degree of discretion on the making of decisions and which normally has some taxing power.

Hence, the definition of local government was made more clear by Kirk Green in (Ola and Tonwe, op.cit: 4) who submitted thus:

Each unit of local government in any system is assumed to possess the following characteristics: a given territory and population, an institutional structure for legislative, executive and administrative purposes, a separate legal identity, a range of powers and functions authorized by delegation from the appropriate central or intermediate legislature and lastly, within the ambit of such delegation, autonomy, subject always, at least in Anglo-American

tradition, to the limitation of common law such as the test of reasonableness.

The Guidelines for Local Government Reform of (1976:1) defines local government as:

Government at the local level exercise through representative council established by law to exercise specific powers within defined area. These powers should give the council substantial control over local affairs as well as the staff and institutional and financial powers to initiate and direct the provision of services and determine activities of state and federal; government in their areas, and the ensure, through devolution of functions to these councils and through the active participation of the people and their traditional institutions, that local initiative and response to local needs and conditions are maximized.

The aforementioned definitions by various scholars listed above clearly show that local government is a multi-dimensional concept. The dimensions are:

1. **Social Dimension**

From the social dimension, local government is basically a social institution. It is an organized social entity based on the feeling of oneness. This emanates from the fact that man is a social animal and must of necessity interact with other people (Ola and Tonwe, 2009: 4-5). Local government provides a platform for people in a locality to express and fulfill their human urge to interact and in the process of interaction, the feeling of convergence bring to the fore the commonality of basic needs of the people in the neighborhood of food, shelter, clothing, water etc. It is those facets of their feeling of oneness that are a binding force not only among themselves but also between the local authority and the local people (Ola and Tonwe, Ibid).

2. **Economic Dimension**

Local government is basically an economic institution with a foremost role to play in promoting the economic well-being of the people of the locality. The economic dimension of the concept of local government relates to its economic viability. Thus revenue generation becomes a primary function of local government. A local government that is not economically viable cannot do much to improve the economic conditions of the people in the locality (Ola and Tonwe, Ibid).

3. **Geographic Dimension**

Local government also has a geographical dimension. From the perspective of a specific and defined territorial jurisdiction over a particular human habitation, the local government may be conceptualized in geographic terms. The geography of local government which includes physical, demographic and economic features has its impact on its policies, administration and law. These various features are of universal character, hence may be conceptualized (Ola and Tonwe, Ibid).

The geographical dimension of local government stems from the fact that among the inhabitants of a given area, there is a consciousness that they are differentiated from the inhabitants of other areas in the same country. This is what is called the concept of neighborhood which makes the inhabitants of an area automatically aware of the interests which infringe upon them more directly than upon others (Ola and Tonwe, Ibid).

4 **Legal Dimension**

Local government is a legal institution in the sense that it is established by law of a competent and higher authority. This makes local government a miniature body-politic and a corporate body. In its former capacity, it is the agent of state and, as such, represents public interest. In that capacity, it exercises a part of the power of the state legally delegated to it within specified geographical boundaries (Ola and Tonwe, Ibid).

5. **Political Dimension**

Local government is seen as a political institution. It is basically, a political mechanism for governance at the grass root level.

6. **Administrative Dimension**

Local government has an administrative dimension. It has its local bureaucracy like other higher levels of government that coordinate the activities and the operation of day- to- day running of the system.

On the whole, it may be said that local government is basically an organized social entity based on the feeling of oneness. In political terms it is concerned with the governance of a specific local area, constituting a political sub-division of a nation, state or other major political units (Ola and Tonwe, Ibid: 14).

In performance of its functions it acts as the agent of the state. In other words, local government is an integrant of the political mechanism for governance in a country. As body corporate and juristic person, it represents a legal concept. The geography, demography and economic factors of a local area, offer important dimension in the conceptual articulation of local government (Ola and Tonwe, Ibid: 14-15).

CORRUPTION IN NIGERIAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION.

According to Olusegun Obasanjo in Akanbi (2005:126) :

Corruption, the greatest bane of our society today, will be tackled head on ... No society can achieve anything near its full potential if it allows corruption to become the full blown cancer it has become.

The above statement illustrates the state of pervasion, rot or decay within the Nigerian state arising from widespread of corruption. Along this line Familomi (2005:51) depicted thus:

Becoming corrupt in Nigeria is almost unavoidable as morality is lax, because to survive people have to make money.

One of the fundamental problems of contemporary Nigeria is corruption. It has thrived, progressed and flourished unabated . Corruption has been institutionalized to the point of accepting it as part of our system. Albeit corruption is ubiquitous, it is found all over the world, but the degree of its manifestation varies from system to system (Lawal and Oladunjoye, 2010: 232). In another, dimension, the widespread of the phenomenon of corruption in Nigeria has being pointed out by Nwabueze (op.cit:133-134) while trying to illustrate the prevalence of corruption in Nigeria.

He opines that:

Corruption in Nigerian is endemic and anomic, somewhat systemic. In terms of dimensions corruption is moral-cum-ethical, on the one hand, and structural on the other. And its explanation and attempts to find solution must address these two sources. It manifests as political, economic, bureaucratic, judicial and even moral corruption. For example, when an official, as a result of undue bribe or promise in any of these spheres, abuses his or other person's office by putting aside due process and compromising fairness and equity in distribution of scarce resources within his

jurisdiction or authority to allocate, this is corruption. In Nigeria, ethnicity (nepotism) lust for power, poverty and personal monetary gains are also major factors in corruption in public office.

Corruption is the greatest bane of local government administration in Nigeria. At the grassroots level, corruption has been canonically accommodated, entertained, and celebrated within the system. In the local government setting corruption is misnomerly labeled and euphemistically referred to as “Egunje” (a slogan which means “illegal offer” in Nigeria) (Lawal and Oladunjoye, op.cit: 232).

Corruption has been described as a major cause of comatose state of local government administration in Nigeria, and a major hindrance to good government (Onwuemenyi, 2008). It has been identified as one of the problems confronting effective local government administration in Nigeria, also non-adherence to provisions of the financial memorandum (FM), conspicuous consumption of the part of the local officials, lifestyles that are not commensurate with official sources of income, imposition of leaders on the local government through corrupted political process and low wages of local government officials (Ali, 2008).

Along this line Farida Waziri the EFCC boss in Onwuemenyi (2008) lamented that:

...waste of government resources at the council level had reached monumental proportions. The local government council in the country could not explain the mismanagement of over ₦3.313 trillion allocated to them in the last eight years. ...a whopping sum of ₦3,313,554,856,541.79 was allocated to local government across the country. Unfortunately, local government officials have not left their hand unsoiled in this regard. It is with regret that I am forced to observe that the local governments of the good old days have become a mere memory of times gone by. The paralysis (corruption) that pervades local governments to day is widespread. Local government, have become so far removed from the lives of the people to a point where some Chief Executives of local council no longer reside in the domains they were elected to administer. They drive to the council headquarters in their jeeps from the state capitals or the Federal Capital Territory, pay salaries and share other monies and disappear until it is time to share the next subvention.

Waziri went further to emphasize that the disconnection between the government of the people and the grassroots was happening at a time huge volumes of public funds were allocated to local government councils. According to her, the old argument that services cannot be delivered to the grassroots because of shortage of funds does not hold water anymore, in the face of so much subvention from center (Onwuemenyi, 2008).

However, contrarily, Omoigui-Okavio, the chairman of Federal Inland Revenue Service in (Onwuemenyi, 2008) observed that:

***The high rate of corruption at local government level
Is as a result of overdependence on oil revenue, with
its attendant laxity on the part of the three tiers of
government to explore other sources of revenue.
Revenue generations and its effective management
are critically important for the survival of local
government councils***

According to her, local government administration has abused the weak tax regulatory system for personal gains, a situation which had complicated the tax system and led to cases of multiple taxation in the economy (Onwuemenyi, Ibid). Omoigui-Okavio also condemned some local government officials for instituting personal and unofficial revenue generation machinery thereby encouraging multiple taxation and placing heavy burden on tax payer, she noted that, many local chairmen generate personal taxes for personal gain using the so called levy collectors who themselves have multiple receipts(Onwuemenyi,Ibid).

Also along this line, Arowolo (2008) opined that, hard earned and limited resources accrued to and raised by local government are always mismanaged. Priorities are misplaced; projects are done not according to or as demanded by the people but regrettable in tune with the selfish end and aggrandizement of the political leadership in collaboration with senior bureaucrats at the local government level of administration.

Generally, wide-scale embezzlement by officials of the grassroots has made the needed development of grassroots a tall dream and has rendered them financially incapable to discharge their constitutionally assigned responsibility (Arowolo, 2008).

Corruption has remained an issue militating against local governments' performance. Oviasuyi, et al (2010) in this regard observed that "as in all levels of government in Nigeria, corruption is predominately widespread, undiluted and unambiguous in the local government". It is a statement of fact that in the local government system, corruption has become all pervading, unabashed,

uncontrolled and persistent. This perhaps explains the inefficiency and ineffectiveness in local government administration in Nigeria. The system has virtually become superfluous and redundant (Oviasuyi, et al, Ibid). Some of the areas where corruption thrives in local government to include the following:

- a. Inflation of prices of bought items;
- b. Over estimation of cost of projects;
- c. The ghost worker syndrome;
- d. Award of contracts and subsequent abandonment ; and
- e. Outright payment of huge sums of money to political godfathers (Oviasuyi, et al (ibid).

However, the effect of corruption on the polity is serious. Lawal and Oladunjoye (2010:233) state the effects as follows:

Firstly, destruction of democratic values, corruption tends to destroy democratic ethos in the local government system. All the values of democracy, such as responsiveness, accountability, participation and human development, are either subdued or neglected where corruption thrives.

Secondly, development is hindered in a regime of corruption. Rather than utilizing the available resources for the upliftment and development of the council, they are diverted to private use.

Thirdly, rule of law is also subverted and replaced by muscle power. In order to successfully steal government resources, the officials in the local government system undermine the rules and regulations that guide their activities and ensure that whatever is stolen by them cannot be traced or tracked within their tenure in office. This has serious implication for service delivery as developmental projects may be abandoned without any necessary action. Also, in this ugly capacity, contracts are bound to be inflated, bribes and kickbacks are bound to be taken and contracts are also bound to be awarded to non-existent companies (i.e. companies that exist on paper alone).

Finally, manpower development and capacity building becomes sluggish and discouraged in the arena of corruption. The Chief Executive of the council is not thinking about the need to train and re-train the staffers, but how to steal the money meant for manpower development and capacity building into his own pocket for selfish purpose. The effect of corruption in the local government council is somehow negative in the sense that democratic values are destroyed and development at grass root is hindered.

Manifestation of Corruption in Nigerian Local Government Administration

Local government is created to ensure meaningful development of the grassroots through participatory approach. Democracy therefore serves as

variable avenue through which the purpose for which local government is created can be achieved (Lawal and Oladunjoye, Ibid).

Regrettably, this is not the case, instead of discharging their functions as development centres, local government have acquired notoriety for corruption, fiscal indiscipline and overall irresponsibility (Agbo 2010:20). It has become high temples of corruption and crass mismanagement where combined effect of graft and inefficiency are proudly showcased by the officials (Ekawu, 2007:18). Alleged corrupt practices include: misappropriation of funds, inflation of contract sums, over-invoicing of goods, unauthorized withdrawals, reckless virement and outright embezzlement (Agbo, Ibid).

To illustrate the level of corruption at local government level, the former chairman of Ezeagu North East local government area council in Enugu State, Mr. Edwin Ofor Nwatarali, has been charged before Enugu High Court by Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offence Commission (ICPC) for allegedly diverting the sum of ₦1, 109,250,00 belonging to the council to his personal use while in the office (Achile, 2011:11). In Bornu State, the former chairman of Monguno local government council, Alhaji Umar Shugaba Gan and Alkali Imam were convicted and sentenced to (7) seven years imprisonment for corrupt practices. They were alleged for conspiracy and making false returns to the tune of one million, five hundred Naira (Madu, 2009:4).

Also sentenced for corrupt practices were Alhaji Gana Abbas, the former chairman of Dambon local government and the treasurer of the council, Alhaji Ali Abacha. They were convicted and sentenced to 17 years imprisonment over misappropriation of public funds while in office as the chairman and treasurer respectively. They awarded contracts for the drilling of boreholes in Azir and Ngwalimi villages for the total sum of ₦12 million. The sum of ₦7 million was approved as mobilization fees for the contract to Galtis Nigeria Water Services. These two officers released only ₦1 million to the contractor and converted the remaining sum of ₦6 million to their personal use (Femi Gold, 2009:8).

ICPC also interrogated, the former chairman of Bassa Local Government Area of Kogi State, Mr. Bako Shiga, he was alleged to have operated a single cash book and awarded contracts without due process which gave room for misappropriation of funds. The former chairman of Dekina local government area council in Kogi State, Adejo Akowe alleged to have collected money for security vote twice in one month, collected money for some sub-heads twice for the same project and conferred undue advantage to himself by virtue of his position (Mike Sowe, 2006:3). The former caretaker committee chairman of Kala Balge local government council in Borno State, Mr. Zanna Abubakar was arraigned in court by ICPC for misappropriation of ₦23, 825,000.00 belonging to the council while serving in office (Ingobro, 2008:3). ICPC also arraigned Saidu

Musa, former chairman of Awe local government area council of Nassarawa State and two top principal officers Mr. Umaru Zanuwa, Director of Works and Alhaji Aso Safiyano, the Director of Finance over various corrupt practices involving N23,503,940.00.

Mr. Umaru H. Zannuwo, who was the Director of Works in the council used his office to confer corrupt advantage upon himself by collecting the sum of N2,430,000.00 for the electrification of Kanje/Kekura, a project which was financed and executed by Japanese Government. He was also accused of using his office as a Director of Works in the council to confer corrupt advantage upon himself by collecting the sum of N4,522,000.00 for purported hiring of a bulldozer in the name of MICGA investment and converted the money to his personal uses. In a related development, he was alleged to have collected N818,000.00 for construction of a bridge but converted the money to his personal use.

Alhaji, Aso Safiyanu, was also alleged to have used his office as the Director of Finance in the council to confer corrupt advantage upon his relation by giving the sum of N500,000.00 belonging to the council to his Brother Bala Safiyanu, who head the National Union of Road and Transport Workers (NURTW) for a service he did not render to the council (Ameh, 2008:6).

The former council chairman of Abeokuta North Local Government Council in Ogun State, Alhaji Morouf Ajisegun was convicted and sentence to two years imprisonment with the option of N500,000.00 fine for lavishing the sum of N260,000.00 meant for printing of exercise books in the local government on Ileya gift (Ingobro, 2006:3).

The above explanations are few examples of financial recklessness in local government councils in Nigeria. The consequence is an emasculating deprivation of basic amenities and a dangerous disconnection and disenchantment of the people with the three tiers of government; while the officials of the council celebrate their ill gotten wealth. The lack of integrity, transparency and accountability at this level of governance is definitely taking a leaving toll on the well being of ordinary Nigerians (Agbo, op.cit).

The Way Forward

This paper has examined the menace of corruption in local government administration in Nigeria vis-à-vis the manifestations in some selected local council across the country, which has constituted a threatening force to grassroots development. In view of the above, the following solutions are recommended.

There is urgent need to put in place an effective and efficient institutional mechanism in all the 774 local government area councils across the country to checkmate the menace of corruption at grassroots level which has hindered

development and participation and local level. EFCC and ICPC should establish their offices in all the local government council across the country in order to strengthen anti-corruption crusade.

Also, the President of Nigeria, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan (2011:1) gave this recommendation when he stated thus:

You must not only shun corruption but join in effort to combat it. You have roles in this crusade, including acting as whistle blowers and providing relevant information to track and prosecute Nigerians.

In line with the above, Aransi (2008:69) also advised that, there is need for a sustained public enlightenment campaign about the right and duties of the entire individuals under the law. Persons convicted of corruption or other economic crimes should be disqualified from holding public office or participating in politics.

Hence, it has also become imperative for local government to motivate their staff by giving better welfare packages or a commensurate salary in order to make them efficient and save them from temptation of stealing government funds.

Integrity must be encouraged, practiced and enforced. The practice and enforcement of integrity in local government will promote accountability and transparency in their operation and prevent misappropriation of funds.

It is the opinion of this paper that implementation of these above recommendations, will help in checkmating and combating this scourge of corruption at local level which has put the development at grassroots into reverse.

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