

# Corruption Prevention in Nigeria: Development, Good Governance and Reform

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## Introduction

The goal of any independent anticorruption agency, wherever it may be located is preventive - that is to reduce or eliminate the incentives and opportunities that make corrupt activities alluring, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of the ruling government by eliminating elements within the system that may be damaging or corrupt. Achieving these aims requires ensuring that anticorruption agencies are provided with sufficient personnel and resources, and that additionally their organisational development needs are met. However, in a systematically corrupt system like Nigeria, where corruption is the norm rather than the exception - means that corrupt activities are promoted or encouraged by the system itself, support for anticorruption agencies is likely to meet with difficulties in such environments. This is because both empirical and anecdotal evidence and the author personal interaction with international and national policy experts, including at the G20 Anticorruption working group (ACWG) - suggest that fighting corruption requires an indirect approach starting with broad underlying features of the governance and developmental problems. This article argues that the first step in fighting corruption must be to renew focus on economic development and welfare. These terms cover a range of government strategies designed to ensure the wellbeing of the citizenry, such as healthcare, education, vocational training, public housing, and public transportation. It argues that until these support structures are easily accessible to the citizens, referred to within the article as "Good governance and Development", countering corruption in Nigeria, will remain a vicious circle.

## Corruption Prevention Challenges

Because corruption corrupt acts occur anytime and anywhere, and in every sector (both private and public sectors) there is tendency of corruption emanating from any angle. Measures must therefore not be reactionary, but preventive (CIER, 2017). In practical terms the work of prevention is "all about intervening before the corrupt conduct occurs" ... prevention is not so much a process of attaching more and more regulations, but a sort of problem solving, where the answer depends upon the difficulty to be resolved (Clarke, 1992). Though prevention is mainly geared towards reducing opportunities for corrupt activity to take place, but there are different forms of preventive policies: some centre on enabling staffs to identify, and then handle, the integrity risks they might face; some anchor on minimising the opportunities for corrupt conduct; some attempt to discourage corruption by raising the risks of being caught for those who partake in corrupt behaviour; some enlarge social controls by increasing condemnation of such conduct by colleagues and some centre on the organisational cul-

ture – that is, the organisational ethics, the conduct that gets rewarded, leadership and communication, hardworking and exemplary achievement (Gorta, 2008). The first thing, that need to be done is for an anticorruption policy to train citizens on preventive process that will make it very difficult for people to engage in any act of corrupt practices. Whilst anticorruption policies should encompass investigation, prevention and education, but low-income countries could profit most from an emphasis on investigation and prosecution, whereas higher-income countries would benefit more from prevention activities (Huberts, 2000).

The first step to prevent something is to understand what it is and how it happens. Corruption is a complex social, political, and economic phenomenon that no country is immune from it and requires multifaceted approach in tackling it. Whilst there is no universally accepted definition of corruption, consistent in all analysis about corruption, nevertheless, is that corruption is wrong – it is always a departure from right ethical conduct. The disagreement among people is on the norms that rule whether one is corrupt, not about the moral turpitude of corruption (DeGraaf, 2007). Exactly what amounts to corruption may be relative, but it is understood to be rooted in social, political, and cultural systems. Corruption is a product of its environment, history, and social development. We therefore fall into a trap whereby we try to define corruption as a technical problem that can be dealt with by changing processes – this view of people is a predominantly economic one where the incentive to act in a corrupt way must be blocked regardless of the often wide-ranging and diverse acts of corruption (Brooks, 2016). Following from this, one can add that all definitions of corruption can be considered as working definitions as they differ according to the context that they are used. This article adopts the current international use of definition of corruption as “the misuse entrusted power for private gain.” This definition is not restricted to a single context as it can apply to both public and private sector corruption. And because public sector corruption is a more fundamental problem than private sector corruption, also controlling public sector corruption is a prerequisite for controlling private sector corruption., essentially, good governance in the public sector acts as a role model.

### ***Good Governance***

Good governance is about the responsibility of governments and governing institutions to meet the needs of the masses as opposed to select groups in society (systemic). The strategies to control corruption comprise long-term processes that are as much about changing attitudes and behaviour as they are about changing the institutions of a society. Curbing corruption is not merely about ethics and morality; it is about good governance and the effective, efficient use of public resources for the public good (Stapenhurst, & Sedigh, 1999). What Nigeria needs is good governance strong institutions to withstands the crippling effect of public sector corruption. All Nigerians are victims of corruption; people are resorting to self-help because they cannot have necessities of life, so this must be discussed. If you want to eliminate corruption in the Nigeria Police Force, for example, you cannot do that without solving the problem of welfare and accommodation of the police personnel and it is so for other forces and the civil service. Every class of the society has one thing or another against the state so this must be discussed. Thus, fighting corruption, it is about reinforcing the public confidence in, and loyalty to, the state and strengthening the state’s financial and policy capabilities to work for the citizens.

### ***Development***

Development is not about helping a few people get rich or creating a handful of pointless protected industries that only benefit the country’s elite. Development is about transforming societies, improving the lives of the poor, enabling everyone to have a chance at success and access to health care and education (Stiglitz, 2002, p. 251–252). Corruption acts as a restraint on development, denying millions of people around the world the prosperity, rights, services and employment which they desperately need – and deserve (UNODC, 2019). Corruption is at the root of Nigeria’s underdevelopment; the emergence of boko haram and gross unemployment (Muhammed, 2018). Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and a very important oil producer. For years it has been struggling to decrease unemployment, income inequality and its dependence on oil. It is widely accepted that the misappropriation of public funds and assets by corrupt elites has been a major cause of Nigeria’s underdevelopment. Increased access to essential infrastructure services could reduce inequality, foster inclusion and support poverty reduction efforts (Calderón, & Chong, 2004; Calderón, & Servén, 2010). What is needed is to address the drains of corruption – that is the areas that makes public service salary in Nigeria inadequate, like the infrastructure services. If one has confidence that public schools can provide quality education to his children, that public

hospitals are effective and efficient and basic services are affordable, then the salary that one's get would be adequate. But what is happening now, is there is desperation and rationalization – such as if one falls sick what will happen to him? Would I be paying so much for my children education, one need to buy generator, dig bore hole etc. Thus, once these desperation issues subsist, no matter what ones get as salary the problem would remain. These issues could be cause or cost of corruption or even both. Their relationship to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are directed to the same problems (health, education, gender equality and economic development) is to the same extent symbiotic with corruption prevention and buttress the significance of accomplishing them (OECD/DAC, 2006). A reduction in corruption depends on economic development.

### **Reform**

Anticorruption reforms are worried not merely with corruption but equally with its effect on development and society. How does corruption hamper poverty reduction by perverting developmental decision making? How ineffectual is bribery? Who eventually suffers the impact of corruption? (Pope, 1999). Nigeria needs to use a multifaceted strategy in countering public sector corruption such as through good governance, transparency, accountability and rule of law, as corrupt leaders cannot wage an effective war against corruption (Dike, 2008). In a developing economy like Nigeria, there is a symbiotic relationship between what we called public sector corruption and the private sector corruption. There is not any corrupt act that takes place in any government organisation perpetuated by any public officer without the active collaboration of accountants, auditors, bankers, lawyers, quantity surveyors, structural engineers from the private sector, either before, during or after the corrupt activity, and this makes harder to control. Looking at the Nigerian peculiarities, it was clear to the economic team working on the reforms that countering corruption would require four critical interconnected strategies; the first was political will from the highest political leadership (the president). The second was specificity by way of pinpointing the most damaging forms of corruption and concentrating on those. And the economic team concluded that the most damaging form of corruption for the economy was theft of public assets, either through outright diversion of public revenues into private hands at the local, state, and federal levels or through inflated contracts. If we can counter this theft, it will have a reverberating impact on other sources and types of corruption. The third was establishing a yardstick indicator of success or other measurable indicating success (corruption measurement), and the fourth the capacity to withstand personal risk, threats or coercion (Okonjo-Iweala, 2016).

In a systematically corrupt system, (Nigeria inclusive), corruption is a collective problem, because people rationalize their own behaviour based on the perceptions of what others will do in the same situation (Persson, Rothstein and Teorell, 2013). When corruption becomes a social norm, everyone starts seeing it simply as the way to get things done. People are aware of the negative consequences of widespread corruption, but they engage in corrupt actions as they believe that “it doesn't make sense to be the only honest person in a corrupt system” (Marquette and Peiffer, 2015).

Nigeria is in a situation whereby corruption is pervasive, humongous and institutionalized, to the extent that corruption is rewarded. In many circumstances it is even required, one is required to be corrupt, you will not get your licence to do anything if you follow the normal process, it is more difficult than if you just bribe, that means it is required. If one wants to get an electricity metre it is easier to bribe your way, than to follow the normal process, that means it is required. Thus, corruption is rewarded and even required in many instances of public functions. What is needed is look at the whole governance and institutional system, and in every country, it will be different. What are the major failings that are the cause, the root cause of corruption? Is it that there is absolute impunity or no rule of law? Is it that there is no voice for the citizens really to make them accountable? Is it that there is lack of necessities of life? etc. (Kaufmann, 2016). Increasing access to essential infrastructures and deployment of technology in the public sector of Nigeria, especially the wet agencies, will contribute greatly towards reducing opportunities for corruption and thereby promoting transparency and accountability in the public sector, thus entrenching ethical values and norms within the civil populace.

## Conclusion

Identifying the nature and characteristics of corruption prevailing in each country is essential in tackling its fundamental causes. Looking at the Nigerian nature and characteristics of corruption, it is systemic - and the most damaging form of corruption for the economy is theft of public assets, either through outright diversion of public revenues into private hands at the local, state, and federal levels or through inflated contracts. If we can counter this theft, it will have a reverberating impact on other sources and types of corruption. In fact, In Nigeria, corruption in procurement, accounts for over two-third of government total budget and therefore affects the efficiency of public spending and the opportunities to improve quality of life of the citizens. This is further worsened by the absence of a favourable policy environment to drive an anticorruption effort – meaning access to essential and basic infrastructure services which makes citizens to rationalize every corrupt act that occurs weather it is in the public or private spheres.

Fighting corruption in Nigeria, requires two important preconditions for implementation of a workable and sustainable anticorruption strategy – political will and favourable policy context. Political will is a crucial factor to develop sustainable and effective anti-corruption programmes, without it other government attempts outlined to promote public sector transparency, integrity and accountability and enhance the relationship between public sector and private sector and foster the active participation of individuals and groups outside the public sector prove to be ineffective. Nevertheless, as Achebe (1983, p.1) has observed, the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership. Is the policy context conducive or hostile for implementing anticorruption reforms? – the experience of Hong Kong and Singapore show that, apart from political will, they have succeeded in fighting corruption because of their favourable policy contexts - they have small populations; stable governments; high standards of living; efficient civil service systems; and well-developed infrastructure. Nigeria needs many leaders who remain committed to implement and persevere with the reforms necessary to significantly reduce corruption, under a favourable policy context. The renew hope of the present administration in Nigeria is a beacon of hope.

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