

Corruption and Development in Delta State

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Abstract

The phenomenon of “corruption” has become a night mare to the individuals, corporate organizations and the government of Nigeria in general and Delta state in particular. It is a cankerworm which has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigeria society, there by threatening its existence as a corporate political entity. The paper is focus on the effect of corruption in Delta State and to proffer possible solutions to these problems through recommendations based on the data obtained from the secondary sources and presented in their content. The paper reveals that corruption has negatively affected the lives of the people significantly. These effects include poor living condition, lack of basic amenities, unemployment, inter-ethnic crises etc. Consequently, the paper recommends that thorough investigation should be carried out by those concerned before any political or civil appointment is offered to any individual in Nigeria.

Keywords: Corruption, Development, Delta State, Nigeria and Politics.

Introduction

Delta State is one of the nine states created in Nigeria on August 27th 1991 by the then military administration. The State was carved out from the defunct Bendel State alongside Edo State. The administrative capital of the state is Asaba. Delta State is a multi ethnic and multi-cultural state. This means that there are different ethnic and cultural group in the State. This feature makes it to be unique in some respects. The major ethnic groups in the state include the Urhobos, Isokos, Ijaws, Itsekiris and the Anioma people. It is one of the economically viable states in Nigeria in general and the Niger Delta region in particular. Delta State is blessed with mineral resource notable among which is crude oil which has contributed significantly to the nation’s economy. Besides being an oil-producing state, it has a fertile land for agricultural production. Some of the products found in the state include cassava, yam,

cocoyam, corn, melon etc. The cash crops include rubber, palm-oil, palm-kernel, timber etc. A lot of fish is also produced in the state especially in the coastal areas of Ijaw and Itsekiri. The state has twenty five Local Government Councils at present. Since its creation eighteen years ago, the state has witnessed different administration – both military and civilian.

The first military administration in Delta State was led by Wing Commander. Luke Ochulor. Others include Col. Bassey Asuquor, Col J.D Dungs, Col. John Yeri, Navy Capt. Ibrahim Kefas among others. The first Executive Governor of the state was Chief Felix Ibru whose tenure/administration was abruptly terminated with military intervention in Nigeria. With the return to civil democratic rule in Nigeria on May 29th 1999, Chief James Onanefe Ibori emerged as the winner of the gubernatorial election held in the state. He became the second democratically elected governor of the state and ruled for a period of eight years (1999-2007). In the April 2007 general election, Dr. Emmanuel Ewetan Uduaghan was declared as the winner and was consequently sworn in as the third Civilian Governor of Delta State. His election as the state governor was controversial as many candidates in the election alleged that there were irregularities and fraudulence in the conduct of the election that brought him to power. Like other states across the nation, Delta State had witnessed different form of communal and ethnic crises which had threatened the peace and stability of the state. Noteable among which were the Ijaw/ Itsekiri Abraka/Ubiaruku, and recently, the Amai/Umuebu crises among others. In all these crises, many lives were lost and properties worth billions of naira were destroyed. These ethnic/communal crises have devastating effects on the development of the state. Delta State is also a multi-religious state. Some of the religious groups in the state include Christian, Islam and traditional religious groups. Each of these religious groups preaches unity and peaceful co-existence among the diverse ethnic groups and people of the state. This has contributed immensely to the unity of the state.

Conceptualization

Corruption is a hydra-headed monster, which permeates all facets of the Nigeria society. However, it is perceived as the orchestrated intention of satisfying personal and selfish intentions and purposes in the discharge of one's statutory responsibilities against established and accepted rules, regulations, norms and ethics. This takes place both in micro and macro organization. Micro organizations such as the family units, cultural, social and religious associations are the micro view of corruption becomes very relevant because of its contagious effect on macro organizations. It therefore becomes a nurturing ground for corrupt practices at the macro level. Corruption at the macro level represents all selfish and self centered activities and behaviours of men at the helm of public and private organizations, societal affairs, governance and governmental agencies, bodies and institutions against established norms, ethics, rules and regulation geared towards illegal acquisition of wealth and personal aggrandizement. This cuts across the legislative, executive and judiciary at the various levels of government in Nigeria. Corruption is a complex attitude which debases a person, undermining his/her integrity, dignity and overall development. It makes one less productive because of its compromising disposition. It manifests easily in the form of bribery, i.e., offering of some gratification for undeserved favour. It is mainly a leadership problem, especially when a government official is given gifts to influence his judgment and award a contract to an unqualified person while the qualified is left out. Such acts have rippling effects on the society and could lead to civil disturbances which do not augur well for a stable polity. The term "corruption" has received various definitions. Corruption according to Azelama, (2002) is a major problem in Nigeria.

Although it is prevalent with varied degrees of intensity across organizations in public and private sectors, it is not to be blamed on managers of these organizations. This is because it is basically an environmental problem. Nigerians are used to leaders who condemn corruption (but) who themselves get involved in (corruption). Sen (1999) is of the view that corruption

has broadly been defined as a pervasion or a change from good to bad. Specifically, corruption involves the violation of established rules for personal gain and profit. Corruption is “efforts to secure wealth or power through illegal means – private gain at public expense, or a misuse of public power for private benefit” (Lipset and Lenz, 2000). In addition, Nye (1967) stated that corruption is a social behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private gain regarding personal, close family, private clique, pecuniary or status gains. It is a behaviour which violates rules against the exercise of certain types of duties for private gains- regarding influence. Corruption is a complex phenomenon. Its root lies deep in bureaucratic and political institutions and its effect on development vary with country’s conditions. It is difficult to define corruption in concise and concrete terms. Not surprisingly, there seldom is a consensus as to what exactly constitute the concept.

Consequently, there is always a danger that several people may engage in a discussion about corruption while each is talking about a different thing completely. To avoid this confusion, we will provide operational definitions of the concept in relation to this work. International Monetary Fund (1999) proffered a working definition of the concept of corruption as “the abuse of public office”. Additionally, the definition given by the Federal Government of Nigeria Independent Corruption Practices and other related offences Act, 2000, perceives corruption to include bribery fraud and other related offences. Huntington (1997) describes the concept “corruption” this way. “A public official is corrupt if he accepts money or money’s worth for doing something that he is under duty to do any way, that he is under duty not to do, or to exercise a legitimate discretion for improper reasons”. Concurring to the above, the World Bank Group (1996) refers to corruption as the abuse of public office for private as well as pecuniary gain. Corruption to this paper is also perceived as a betrayal of trust resulting directly or indirectly from the subordination of public goals over those of the individual. Thus, a person who engages in nepotism has committed an act of corruption by putting his family’ interest over those of the larger society.

Forms of Corrupt Practices in Delta State

The forms of corrupt practices in Nigeria and by extension in Delta State could be categorized into six.

1. **Looted Funds and Wealth Kept Secretly Abroad:** These include ownership of coded secret bank accounts abroad from money and property stolen from Nigeria. They also exist in form of mansions worth billions of dollars in major cities of the world like London, New-York, Paris, Cape-Town etc. (Akpotor, 2007: 329).
2. **Misappropriation of Public Funds:** Embezzlement, swindling and looting of public treasury are related to the form of corruption discussed above because some of the stolen funds may be kept or spent locally or spirited abroad (Ibid. p 329).
3. **Money Laundering:** This includes extra legal and illegal transfer of funds across national borders by avoiding official controls over such transfer (Ibid, p. 329).
4. **Gratification:** This involves monetary, pecuniary, material or physical favour (e.g. sexual relation) as a condition or reward for performing official duty. They involve receiving and giving these favours in order to influence official decisions and behaviours. (Ibid p 330).
5. **Abuse of office:** This embraces both political and official corruption in which an incumbent violates the oath of office and debases official procedures for personal financial and non-material gain, for obstructing the course of justice as well as due process or rule of law and for offering undeserved advantages or favour to self or others. (Ibid. p. 330).
6. **Nepotism:** This is a kind of favouritism. Unlike gratification, nepotism confers undeserved favours and advantages without receiving and giving gratification. So,

nepotism is a corrupt practice based on ethnic, clan, family, sibling and biological or primordial relationship. (Ibid, p. 330).

The Effects of Corruption in Delta State

The debilitating effects of corruption and mismanagement in any economy and society cannot be over emphasized. The followings are the effects of corruption. * Corruption has hampered national economic, social and political progress, notably in developing countries including Nigeria. He further asserted that due to corrupt patronage, public resources are allocated inefficiently, competent and honest citizens feel frustrated and as a consequence, productivity is lower, administrative efficiency is reduced and the legitimacy of political and economic order is undermined.

*Corruption leads to inflated cost of government programmes and reduces government services. Additionally, corruption leads to political instability. Past coups in Nigeria were attributed to corruption and mismanagement. Invariably, political instability in Nigeria is the out-come of corruption.

*Corruption leads to fragile political and economic system as is the case of Nigeria and Delta State in particular. Corruption distorts the stability of political and economic structures and only helped to boost the civilian and military echelon who used the machinery of government for self-aggrandizement at the expense of the majority. Corruption has debased Nigeria's image.

*Corruption is retrogressive and stagnate development. Achebe (1983) argued that corruption in Nigeria has reached a fatal stage that the country was probably bound for the death bed if nothing dramatic was done. Nigeria has lost valuable opportunity in the global community due to corruption practices. The corrupt behaviour of some of our nationals has brought humiliation to many Nigerians at home and abroad. The phenomenon increases everyday unabated. Transparency International has repeatedly ranked Nigeria at the rear of corrupt countries in the world.

The paper reveals that corruption in public sector harms society in the following ways: Corruption tends to discourage honest efforts; Corruption discourages economic initiative; It produce mistrust of leadership groups and breeds resistance; A general climate of corruption encourages officials to misdirect scarce resources to low priority sectors; Corruption tends to discourage investment; and More than anything, corruption diminishes the value of a society, destroys its very fabric and perpetuates economic dependency and underdevelopment. Corruption can destroy the legitimacy of a government. Corruption makes civil servants to reduce or withdraw their services or leave the country. The brain drain syndrome in Nigeria could be linked to corruption.

According to Oloja (2002), you can hardly enter an office and get your file signed except you drop some money. Even the security personnel at the gate will ask for tips (bribe). He went further to state that "it leads to slow moving files that get through the desks of officers once the interested parties have compromised themselves. It also leads to "missing" files that would resurface immediately the desk officer is settled, unnecessary bureaucracy and delays until fees are paid. An economy undermined by corruption has the effect of discouraging potential foreign investors and public donors. If development is to succeed, countries have to be able to attract a flow of capital. "Success, they say, attracts money; waste, failure and chaos drive it away". Entrepreneurs have been known to withdraw from Nigeria because of the constraints imposed on them by corruption on a scale which they consider unacceptable. And as for public donors, they are reluctant to offer financial aid to those countries that

manage their own resources poorly. It is precisely because of this that has made the G8 not to cancel Nigeria external debts in the past. (Ibid; 367-368, 432).

The paper reveals also that corruption is a destabilizing force in any society where it is being perpetrated. Over the years, Nigeria and indeed, Delta state have suffered untold hardship as a result of corrupt leadership and practices both in government and private institutions. Consequently, poverty, unemployment, capital flight as a result of close down of companies by foreign investors operating in the country, constant violence among the people, youth restiveness, lack of infrastructural development, rising cost of living, lack of confidence in the government by the people, diminished value of the society, fragile political and economic institution among others are some of the problems and social vices associated with corruption. Corruption tends to discourage honest efforts, it discourages economic initiative, it produces mistrust of leadership groups and breeds resistance, etc.

Conclusion

Corruption is a social vice which impedes the growth, development and progress of any society and that of Delta State is no exception. The research paper work holds the view that a corruption free society is a sine qua non to the actualization of a country's developmental goals and objectives. In recognition of the enormous damage done to the nation's economy through corruption, the government at the federal level established different commissions to carry out the task of fighting the scourge of corruption in the country. These include the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (E.F.C.C) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and miscellaneous offence Commission (I.C.P.C.). With these instruments at the disposal of the government, many corrupt practices and cases have been uncovered in the nation and many culprits have been punished either by being sentenced to jail or by forfeiture of illegally- acquired assets to the federal government

Back in Delta State, the government has as well put mechanisms in place to check corruption and also to ensure that government projects are effectively and efficiently executed. In spite of this, it is being argued by some individuals that the various project monitoring institutions or mechanism put in place to check corruption are ineffective. Despite all these mechanisms put in place by the government to check corruption in the country in general and Delta State in particular, corruption is still on the increase on daily basis. In view of this, this paper opines that the government should strengthen its anti-corruption drive in order to bring this canker worm to a final halt in order to usher in the much needed development in the state.

Recommendations

Based on these research findings, the following recommendations are hereby postulated in order to reduce corruption in Delta State:

- (a) Respect and honour should not be accorded to people with ill-gotten wealth;
- (b) Those found culpable of corrupt practices either in private or public organizations should be severely punished to serve as deterrents to others.
- (c) Thorough investigation should be carried out to assess the source of wealth of political office seekers before they are appointed into government offices. Those with corrupt records in the past should not be given any political appointment
- (d) It has been argued that public and civil servants are under- remunerated hence their indulgence in corruption. In this regard, it is recommended that the government should increase the remuneration package of civil servants so as to meet up with their financial and economic obligations,
- (e) The religious worship centers have a role to play in the fight against corruption. In this regard, they should discourage preaching's that centre on materialism. In contrast

to this, they should be bold enough to rebuke any of their members who vigorously pursues wealth through crooked or dubious means.

- (f) The citizens of this country Nigeria in general and Deltans in particular should be educated on how to defend their rights and should resist and attempt by individuals to intimidate them into corruption practices.

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