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Corruption and Service Delivery: A Content Analysis of Nigeria Local Governments Administration

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Abstract:

Nigeria local government is the closest to the people at the grass root which supposed to provide some basic needs for the people; various forms of corrupt practices have negated this constitutional duty. Corruption has become a cankerworm sucking into the system of every nation without differentiation between developed and emerging economies. It is conspicuously and widely pronounced in the developing nation like Nigeria hence its negative effects on economic development. This paper therefore examined the concept of corruption as it affects service delivery in Local Governments in Nigeria. The paper critically looked into the concepts of Corruption, Service Delivery and Local Government. The paper specifically conceptualizes corruption in the Local government administration in Nigeria and the impact on service delivery. The study thus, recommends that the value system at the local government should be reassessed and that there should be adequate social security that will cater for the needs of dedicated officers after their useful productive lives. The paper further recommends that due process and rule of law should be enhanced at the local government levels and that the Financial Crime regulatory institutions should extend their anti-corruption search light to the grass root level in Nigeria and at the same time, all the outstanding financial fraud cases of the past local government officials that are in the various court in Nigeria should be concluded on time so as to checkmate and serve as deterrent to others.

Keywords: *Corruption service delivery, local government*

1. Introduction

Corruption is a global endemic which have penetrated to all human endeavor; it does not differentiate between the developed and emerging economic nation though it is widely pronounced in developing nations which has been having negative economic effects on their development. This is to say that development is inversely related to corruption while the corrupt people see the act as a normal way of life. Danjuma (2010) states that corruption denies the ordinary citizen the basic means of livelihood, it worsens unemployment and erodes our image as a nation and as individual. In Nigeria, eradicating corruption has been a major concern for all previous government at all levels but such an aim has not been accomplished. The causal relationship between a nation's value system (defined in terms of its aversion to corruption) and its level of development is a common knowledge. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), (2008) highlighted the importance of addressing corruption as a development phenomenon which has stunted human progress in many crimes. Also, there are too many stories in too many countries in too many regions of the world of infrastructure projects being undertaken with development money which served no public purpose, yet filled corrupt officials' pockets with donors' money. Project and programmes founded through loans have failed to meet their objectives, hence leaving the public with massive debts. The primary aim of any government is to provide welfare for its citizenry and by its nature local government in Nigeria has long been given recognition as a veritable way by which the development could be brought to every nook and cranny of local community. This is because it is very close to the grass root which is better to identify the immediate needs of the people and make provision for such needs. But corruption like fraud, embezzlement of public funds, assets use for private purpose, payroll inflation, contract scam etc. has contributed to the inability of local community to enjoy some social amenity which should have been provided by local government. In fact, local government in Nigeria is fertile ground for corruption due to neglect by all anti-corruption agencies. This has been a significant factor leading to the general failure of local government as well as excuse for suspending representative institution. El-Rufai (2012), analyzes corruption in local government, according to him 774 Local Governments and the 6 Area Council in Nigeria received almost One trillion naira from the Federation Account, which is equivalent to the entire annual budgets of Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Burundi and Togo combined. These allocations were basically to provide roles such as; the administration of primary education and primary health care, construction of markets and provision of boreholes, and rural development in general but nothing or little to show for this enormous fund received from the Federation Account by the Local government authority in Nigeria.

Virtuous societies are built by leaders who are accountable to the led and are driven by the altruistic desire to improve the lot of the highest number of the people. This is the essence of good governance and democracy and its dividends that many people especially at the grass root are yearning for. This paper therefore conceptualizes the corruption in the Local government administration in Nigeria and the impact on service delivery. Specifically, the paper examines the concept of corruption, service delivery and local government administration.

1.1. Conceptual Clarification

Adeyemi, (2012) stated that within the discipline 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. Necessarily, the concepts in this paper needs to be position within the context of the analysis and should be in line with the theoretical understanding of the subject matter. Therefore, the conceptual framework of corruption is to be stated ahead of others like local government and service delivery.

1.1.1. Corruption

Desta (2006), defines corruption as outright theft, embezzlement of funds or other misappropriation of state property, nepotism and the granting of favour to personal acquaintances and the abuse of the public authority to exact payments and privileges. Views from these perspectives, the masses are seen as the Principal victim and the public officials as the Agent. Orukwoku (2012) look at corruption as effort geared towards securing wealth and power through illegal means for private gains at public expenses and peril. It is also a misuse of public power for private benefits, the violation of established rules for personal gains and profit.

Corruption according to Kalu (1991) is the conscious and well-planned act by a person or group of persons to appropriate, by unlawful means, the wealth of another person or group of persons. Corruption can also be seen as diversion of resources from the betterment of the community to the gain of individual at the expense of the community. Also, Nwabueze (2012) conceptualizes corruption as a form of social deviance in some cases, criminal deviances, and 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. According to Nwabueze definition above, corruption takes several ways, if a public officer embezzles public funds entrusted with him that is corruption. In another view, if the public officer does unauthorized spending or spending above approved limits for dubious reason, that is corruption. If he, in defiance of the rules, allocates government land to himself, his wife, his children or friends or otherwise appropriates his position to his or other person's unfair advantage; it is corruption.

Also, Odey (2002) examines corruption in Nigeria as the air which every living person breathes in and out, to him, nobody makes any effort to breath in the air, it comes naturally. Corruption in Nigeria has become a way of life and many Nigerians simply become corrupt without making any effort and often even without having knowledge of it. Buhari (2016) defines corruption as the greatest form of human right violation. Adeyemi (2016) states that the stain of corruption did not spare anti-graft agencies as former Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission, EFCC, Ibrahim Lamode was accused of fraudulently diverting over N1 trillion proceeds from corruption recovered by the agency. This shows that the menace of corruption is the order of the day in Nigeria because those who were saddled with responsibility of tackling corruption are also alleged of illegal wealth acquisition.

Corruption in Nigeria is like a virus that passes from parent to the children, as all level governance and all tiers of governance are have been found guilty of it. Jola (2016), states that Former President Olusegun Obasanjo has described the National Assembly as a den of corruption. Part of the speech deliver by the ex-president as quoted by Jola (2016) which centered on the level of corruption among the members of the house has it thus:

"Members of the National Assembly pay themselves allowances for staff and offices they do not have or maintain. Once you are a member, you are co-opted and your mouth is stuffed with rot and corruption that you cannot opt out as you go home with not less than N15 million a month for senator and N10 million for a member of House of Representatives"

By and large, the corruption in Nigeria government terrain could be either in form of political or economic corruption. Political corruption is the use of legislative powers by government officials for illegitimate private gain (<http://en.wikipedia.org>). Political corruption is peculiar with the political office holders, public servants, bureaucrats, the press and the general public while economic corruption ravaging the Nigeria economy could as well be noticed in financial institutions such as banks, the insurance companies and the stock brokers. Dike (2010), opined that in Nigeria, the embezzlement of public funds is one of the most common ways of economic accumulation, perhaps due to lack of strict regulatory system.

1.2. Corruption Taxonomies

Over the years, literature review has classified corruption into different typologies by different authors which includes: petty or grand, administrative or political or active, a way of life or a fact of life, incidental or systemic and well-organized or chaotic (Mauro, 1998, Kpundeh, 1998; UNDP, 2008 & Quah, 2007). Corruption can be also construed to include such practices and behaviors such as bribery, electoral corruption, favoritism, nepotism, procurement scam, budget corruption and misappropriation of public resources for personal gain (Nye, 1967; Otusanya, 2011; Agbibo, 2012; Ijewreme, 2015). Take for example, Otusanya (2011) in his literature review identified 15 types behaviors as well as

practices that can be labeled as corruptions follow: bribery, extortion, intimidation, abuse of office, fraud, embezzlement, favoritism, insider trading, conflict of interest, receiving an unlawful gratuity, illegal contributions, money laundering, identity theft, white collar crime and nepotism. Some of these have been reviewed as following:

- Abuse of power will include corruption behavior such as favoritism, nepotism, and extortion (Otusnay, 2011)
- Nepotism implies sharing of the state resources as well as appointments and promotions on the basis of one's family members and relatives but not on merit (Nye, 1967; Otusanya, 2011; Atelhe & Agada, 2014; Ijewereme, 2015).
- Favoritism refers to bestowal of preferential treatment or favour by an entrusted office holder on basis of prejudices such as family relationship, ethnic, party or religious affiliation, or even friendship ((Nye, 1967; Otusanya, 2011; Atelhe & Agada, 2014; Ijewereme, 2015).
- Bribery is another corrupt behavior that is widely review in the literature and stands as a proxy for corruption (Lui, 1985; Ariyabuddhiphongs & Hongladarom, 2014. Otusanya (2011) looked at the bribery in his literature as the commonest type of corruption. And it refers to the act of offering and receiving using an extra-legal means to influence the performance or otherwise of a constituted responsibility.
- Extortion means the use of threat by a holder of an entrusted authority whether public or private to get other individual persons or organizations the permission of services or benefits in which they are legally entitled. It is a form of corruption particularly in the developing countries (Ghatak & Iyengar, 2014).
- Ghost worker issues emanated when the management of an entity (private, public, or even not for profit organization) deliberately decide to inflate the payroll through the inclusion of fake and fictitious names. Thus, the resulting surplus is often siphoned for selfish personal benefits (Ijewereme, 2015).

However, the enormous consequences of corruption especially in the Local government have been contributing to the poor service delivery. Corruption in the public sector leads to loss of: integrity, citizen trust, capacity to be effective and efficient in the delivery of goods and services, compliance with regulation and competent employee (Thompson, 1992; Caiden & Dwivedi, 2001; Quah, 2007).

1.3. Service Delivery

Kayode, Adagba, and Anyio, (2013), conceptualized service delivery to imply tangible and intangible goods and services provided by the government in order to improve the well-being of the citizenry. Also, Carlson, Lamalle, Fustukian, Katy, Sibbons, and Sondorp, (2005), posits service delivery as the relationship between policy makers, service providers and poor people. According to them, it encompasses service and their supporting systems that are typically regarded as a state responsibility. These include social services (primary education and basic health services), infrastructure (water, sanitation, roads and bridges) and services that promote personal security (justice, police etc.).

El-Rufai (2012) lamenting on poor service delivery stated that; the primary responsibility of local governments as enshrined in the Constitution is rural, urban and community development. However, rather than working to reduce poverty by providing these services to their people, they end up just paying salaries of primary school teachers, and nothing much more.

It must be noted here that the effective service delivery in the local government is like rendering a service that is in line with the customer desires, needs and expectations. Here, the people at the grassroots are the customer and the political office holders and the bureaucratic at the local government administration are the sellers who must be always meet the need of their customer in term of service delivery. The absence of provision of basic needs in the local government in Nigeria is as a result of presence of various typologies of corruption which hinders the service delivery at the local government level. Instead of local governments to discharge their functions as development centre, local governments have acquired notoriety for corruption, fiscal indiscipline and overall irresponsibility (Agbo, 2010).

1.4. Concept of Local Government

Local Government in Nigeria is a creation of Nigeria Constitution and they exist to ensure meaningful development of the grassroots through participatory approach. Oviasuyi, et al (2010), stressed that 1979 and 199 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) stated the function of local government in its forth schedule; the basic functions which all local governments in Nigeria are established to perform, resolve around the following:

- Functions in which success depends on communities' responsiveness and participation;
- Functions which require detailed local knowledge for efficient performance;
- Functions which are of personal nature requiring provision close to where the individuals affected live; and
- Functions in which significant use of discretion or understanding of individuals are needed.

This means that local government is a legally set up to for the people at the grassroots level purely for developmental purposes (Bamgbose, 2011)

Odion (2009) refers to Local Government as the public affairs organ that is closer to the people. He stated further that in the conception of the guideline to the 1979 Local government reform in Nigeria, local government is the government at the local level exercised through representation council and established by law to exercised specific powers within defined areas. It serves as a tool for political education and participation as well as provides the basis for dispensing services in line with local needs. Nwaodike (2013) state that local government is government at the local level created to decongest the functions and burden of the other tiers of government, bring about democratic climate of opinion; provided valuable political education, provide two-way communication; and ensure even and rapid development

Lawal (2000) looks at the local government as that tier of government closest to the people, which is vested with certain powers to exercise control over the affairs of the people in its domain.

The essence of local government is to bring the people participation in the governance to the grassroots and ensure that the dividends of democracy are extended to every nook and cranny of Nigeria. This can only be accomplished if the local governments abide by the rules that create and ensure the quality services are delivered by providing some basic needs at the grassroots. However, local government in Nigeria has derailed on fulfilling their obligations at the grassroots due as excessive corrupt practices.

2. Theoretical Framework

The principal-agent theory is adopted to explain the corruption model as relates to this paper. This occurs when a monopolist (the Agent) is able to make decisions on behalf of or that impact another person (the Principal). This monopolist mostly acts in his own best interest which is contrary to those of his principal. In this case, the principal agent theory adopted from Batley (2005) assumes that actors are motivated by rational self-interest. The issues in connection with this paper is how the principal (the people at the grass root) can manage the self-interest of those empowered to act on their behalf (the agent: bureaucratic, politicians, government officials, legislators etc.) so that it will align with the purposes that they (the principals) wish to achieve. The problem arises not just from conflict of interest but also from the privilege access of the agents to information. The agent who has been employed to provide a service will tend to use their superior knowledge to divert benefits in their own directions.

Hague (1996) argue that public administration itself is prone to corruption, since officials exercise a substantial amount of power. These are possibilities for acquiring improper benefits by interpreting or bending rules in favour of certain groups or individual.

In a democratic polity, the ultimate principals are the citizens who are the consumers of specific service provided by the government. In the political agent theory, they are the principal in the sense that politicians as agents seek their mandate from and act as the representatives of the public. But, the contrary are now in the case of the local government in Nigeria, the agent (bureaucrat and political office holders) misuses the trust granted from the principal (the people at grass root) and, rather than the agents acting in the best interest of the principals; they acts to enrich themselves through mean of corrupt practices, such as illegal diversion of fund meant to provide social amenities for the principals, contract inflation, payroll scams, etc. Whereas in the agent –principal relationship, the principals give power to the agents which may be through an election, to act on their behalf, for instance to provide portable water, motor able roads, provision of medical care and other social amenities which can make the life of the principal more meaningful. The agency theory was adopted for this study because it serves as a link between the government and the governed at the local government level in Nigeria.

3. Conclusion

It is a shame that corruption in the public sector especially local government in Nigeria has become a way of life and is an act perpetuated with impunity. Public officials (bureaucrats and political office holders) flaunt at home and abroad wealth; the source of which cannot be explained. Over the years we have witnessed misappropriation of public funds, stealing of the common wealth of the people; while citizens watched helplessly, how those who hold positions of trust most especially at grass root level, have abused such positions and wreaked havoc on the people's resources. It is saddening that most local government authorities in Nigeria are not functional in terms of providing basic social amenities to its people. They have woefully failed in terms of providing the quality service delivery to the people at the grass root; and to a greater extent being ineffective and inefficient. The inefficiency of political office holders for instance lies in the bureaucracy of government that makes transaction processes long and crooked; it lies in our acceptance of the philosophy of power without accountability.

4. Recommendation

The study thus, recommends that the value system at the local government should be reassessed by stopping to celebrate the peoples' wealth without reference to sources of such wealth. This has been a major contributing factor to corrupt practice in Nigeria. Lack of adequate social security that will cater for the needs of dedicated officers after their useful productive lives should be looked into. The philosophy of due process and rule of law should be enhanced at the local government levels so as to ameliorate corruption in the system. Also, the Financial Crime regulatory institutions should extend their anti-corruption search light to the grass root level in Nigeria and all the outstanding financial frauds cases on the past local government officials that are in the various courts in Nigeria should be concluded on time so as to serve as deterrent to others. This has the tendency to minimize resource mismanagement, plunder and outright conversion of public fund to personal use. This has been an obstacle to good quality service delivery at the local government levels in Nigeria.

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